

SO YOU THINK



YOU CAN WRITE?

THE DEFINITIVE GUIDE TO
SUCCESSFUL ONLINE WRITING

JULIA MCCOY

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**THE DEFINITIVE GUIDE TO
SUCCESSFUL ONLINE WRITING**

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Praise for *So You Think You Can Write?*

“*So You Think You Can Write?* by Julia McCoy is full of easy-to-understand, actionable steps to improve your writing. I found the search engine optimization (SEO) tips particularly helpful and cannot wait to start using them on my website! It’s a must-have ‘desk’ reference!”

—**Lisa Kimrey, RN, BSN, MBA**

Professional Consultant and Writer at My Life Nurse, LLC

www.mylifenurse.com

“Julia went from working at McDonald’s to building a multi-million dollar copywriting agency off a \$75 investment and the sweat of her own brow... before the age of 25. If you’re serious about a career in online copywriting, you need this book.”

—**Jeff Deutsch**

VP of Marketing at Ptengine

CRO/UX/SEO and Contributor to Inbound.org, HubSpot

“*So You Think You Can Write?* is an absolute must-read book for anyone in the online writing space. Julia’s book literally covers everything, from how online content is taking over the marketing world, to the role of SEO in online content; creating different types of online content to increase engagement; and the most important thing for online writers, which is how to get started making money and marketing yourself as a copywriter. Do yourself a favor and take the time to read this book, it will pay you dividends for years to come.”

—**Brandon Schaefer**

Brand Strategist, Growth Hacker, CEO at MyVirtualSalesForce.com

“As a small business owner who depends on promoting my company through writing on the internet, I’ve been overwhelmed by what I should do and how to do it. Julia McCoy has written just the book I’ve needed to focus my efforts—and it’s working. Although this book isn’t aimed solely at the small business owner, I feel it should be on every owner’s shelf.”

—**Clinton Keith**

Video Game Developer, Certified Scrum Trainer and Agile Coach

Author, *Agile Game Development with Scrum*

Owner of [Clinton Keith Consulting](#)

“Julia shows in her book exactly how to be an expert in online writing by breaking down the complexity of it into easy-to-understand steps. The SEO part, which can be overwhelming for writers or small business owners, is explained in a non-technical way. Julia’s book gives a clear overview of the most important aspects of SEO in relation to online writing. I will be using this book as guidance when outsourcing content writing. This will promote the end goal of high-quality, next-level content.”

—**Daniel Lacroix**

Physical Therapist, Owner of Lumbago Solution
www.lumbagosolution.com

“After being in the digital space for over 15 years, I wish I could have had this book when I started. It is an invaluable resource. What took me literally thousands of hours to learn and apply correctly, Julia has summed up in less than 200 pages. A must-have blueprint for all businesses that want to generate online leads ‘the right way’ through content marketing.”

—**Shane Barker**

Digital Strategist, Business Consultant
#1 Ranked Social Media Influencer & Consultant
Contributor to SEMrush.com, MarketingProfs.com
www.shanebarker.com

“Julia offers clear insights into the world of digital content and writing for the online audience (both humans and search engines). Her information is actionable and her tips on working with keywords and SEO are spot on. Julia has a solid understanding of writing in the digital age and shares her knowledge throughout the book.”

—**Tamara Budz**

Founder, Marketing Strategist at Silver Shade Group
www.silvershadegroup.com

“Over the past 5 years, I’ve seen content marketing change from being an opportunity to becoming an obligation for businesses small and large. Hence, the ever-increasing need for marketers offering great content. But what makes great content? As an engineer and entrepreneur who loves content but wasn’t trained to write, I’ve never ceased to be intrigued by this

question. And if there's one thing I learned from running a software platform that helped millions of users publish tens of millions of pieces of content online: while creating amazing content is not an exact science, there are rules. A natural-born writer who excels at making things accessible and practical, Julia does an awesome job in this book at articulating what it takes to create content your targeted audience will love. Something any web writer can and should learn."

—**Guillaume Decugis**

Entrepreneur, Co-Founder & CEO at Scoop.it

"*So You Think You Can Write?* is packed with the lessons Julia has picked up over many years as a successful writer. Drawing on her experience of developing successful online content, Julia provides practical tips on how to write and improve your content. Whether you are a freelance writer or a content crafter for a major brand, you will find her book a valuable resource."

—**Steve Rayson**

Director at BuzzSumo

Entrepreneur, Startups & Tech Enthusiast

"Authorship is more than just about writing good prose; nowadays, it's all about branding and being visible in a cyberspace full of other writers, other words. *So You Think You Can Write?* is absolutely loaded with useful information: Julia's detailed tutorial on how to maximize your writing potential online, through seven different forms of writing, SEO and astute keyword choice, is among the best information on the subject that I have read. What is particularly interesting is her advocacy of the importance and usefulness of long-form prose—something many writers I know both enjoy producing and miss from much of the online content around. This is an invaluable book for authors who don't just want to put their words online, but to ensure the highest visibility for their work, and hence, their business."

—**Claire Cowling**

Author

www.clairecowlingauthor.com

“In *So You Think You Can Write?* Julia McCoy provides solid examples of quality copywriting. Disclaimer boxes clarify exceptions and potential areas of confusion for new writers. McCoy goes beyond the basics of the copy, offering concise but thorough advice on SEO, metadata, necessary HTML, and more. She handles otherwise touchy topics for freelancers with tact, diplomacy, and transparency, spelling out exactly what a writer needs to get started: the tools, the time commitment, and the potentially low investment required to build a robust brand with talent and strategy. McCoy’s personal experiences are sincere and validating – necessary for other writers on any point of that journey.”

—**Tara M. Clapper**

Blog Editor, [SEMrush](#)

Senior Editor, [The Geek Initiative](#)

“If you need to market your product online, you will love this book. If you want to grow your online following, you will love this book. If you love to write and are ready to turn words into cash, you will love this book. Almost every mistake I made when I built my first company could be attributed to a lack of knowledge in SEO and the importance of online content. Julia’s book will arm you with the knowledge and tactics to be successful as a business owner or freelancer who wants to win on the web.”

—**Seth Kniep**

Owner of Nells Coffee, [nellscoffee.org](#)

Entrepreneur, Coach

So You Think You Can Write?

*The Definitive Guide to
Successful Online Writing*

Julia McCoy

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Email: Julia@expresswriters.com

www.expresswriters.com/so-you-think-you-can-write

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“Do, or do not. There is no try.”—Yoda

“Experience: that most brutal of teachers. But you learn, my God do you learn.”—C. S. Lewis

To every writer and creator who has what it takes inside, and isn't afraid to learn.

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Foreword

Whether you're leveraging content for SEO, ad/sales copy, social media, or blogging: content is the key.

In this book, Julia has laid the groundwork for teaching anyone—from a novice writer to business owner—how to harness and put to applicable use the skill of writing online content. Julia has a fun, engaging voice, bringing clarity and understanding to heavy learning. She has an energetic way of writing: it's not your typical marketing read.

Regardless of your level, you'll thoroughly enjoy this refreshing, yet thorough, guidebook.

I've been in the marketing industry for over 13 years, and my number one piece of advice to newcomers is to learn how to leverage content. The right words can make a world of difference. Over the years, writing content has helped me build my personal brand, a seven-figure marketing agency, secure speaking engagements, and gain thousands of customers at my startups.

If you put Julia's well-taught online writing skills to use, big things will happen: read this book prepared to learn!

—Sujan Patel

Co-founder of ContentMarketer.io & Narrow.io

Co-Author of Content Marketing Playbook: Master the Art of Content Marketing

*Internet Marketer, Digital Marketing Strategist,
Austin, Texas*

Acknowledgments

My book was made possible with a great support network. Through the writing, and subsequent painstaking rounds and re-rounds of writing this book, I've discovered how writing a book is like a pregnancy: it's long, hard, and takes months of development. (Speaking from experience here: I've birthed a child naturally.)

I'm truly grateful to the first managers I ever hired to assist me in running my company, and from whom I personally learned a great deal of content wisdom: Annie and Alecs Ianko, two sisters in Europe who have been in my management team since the beginning.

I'm indebted to everyone who took time to review my book. I know it was a big undertaking, especially since I bugged all of you around the Christmas holiday season. A special thanks goes out to Annie, my primary editor who patiently read through the first main draft of my book. Wendy Cohan for her golden touch as an editor. Lisa Kimrey, for reviewing my early draft on short notice and offering kind words and helpful thoughts. Thanks to my uncle, Clinton Keith, for giving me early, fantastic insights and feedback. Jeff Deutsch, I'm indebted to you for helping me understand the trust and citation flow metrics more than any article I read online, and for inspiring me to share my story in the introduction. Sujana Patel, for your top-notch advice on my book sections and for undertaking my foreword. Guillaume Decugis, someone I greatly respect in the content marketing scene, for reviewing my entire book in early draft stage and sending great feedback. Thank you, Tara Clapper, for reviewing on short notice and offering wonderful insights. Thanks to Clara, my diligent artist, for pouring so much creativity, time and care into the illustrations inside this book. And thank you so much to everyone else that spent a few minutes of their life reviewing my book. You're all awesome.

To my clinical instructor, Mrs. Plunkett: I haven't been able to reach you,

but if you're reading this right now, *thank you* for failing me in nursing school. If it wasn't for you, I may never have completely focused on my business, made it my sole source of income, and put all my elbow grease into it, at the age of 21. You told me that maybe nursing wasn't my calling, but maybe the business I was starting was—in the nicest way possible. And you were right.

This book would not be possible without the support and help of my husband Josh, who is also the COO of my company. Thanks, Josh, for sticking around and working with me, side-by-side, to improve our brand, develop our system, and grow our business—no matter how noisy (read: annoying) I may get while we're in the same room working together. Also, all credits go to you for coming up with the title, *So You Think You Can Write?* Nice light bulb moment—thanks for succumbing all rights. You're a fantastic person.

Introduction

SEO: Search engine optimization (SEO)—

the process of affecting the visibility of a website or a web page in a search engine's unpaid results—often referred to as “natural,” “organic,” or “earned” results. (Wikipedia)

Content: /kən'tent/ (media)—

the information and experience(s) directed towards an end-user or audience. Something that is to be expressed through some medium, as speech, writing or any of various arts. (Wikipedia)

As an online marketer, site owner, and freelance writer, I've been in “online content creation” since 2011. In a short few years, I've seen the entire world of online content evolve for hundreds of businesses.

The good news is that I've seen a great deal of *progression*.

In 2011, I saw a lot of sub-par online content do just fine. And then Google Panda hit the web. A lot of duplicate, keyword-stuffed, poor content got struck down from the rankings.

Every time a major Google update has come out, I've researched it, written about it, and watched marketers flinch—and then adapt. Some of my favorite clients were the marketers who came to me with the need to change and fit their content to the new Google rules and regulations. I think I was on speed dial for some of them.

It was simple, really. Many of these marketers just needed higher quality content. Or, they needed to replace the duplicate content on their site that they'd copied over from somewhere else on the web (yikes).

Today's overall online content direction is progressing toward a higher content quality and standard, all over the web. And who's the major driving force? Google.

I've been doing this for half a decade now, and I run a seven-figure company with a team of talented writers delivering online content to businesses of all kinds. This has been my self-taught, full-time career path.

Here's my belief about succeeding in this field: you don't need a college course to learn to be an online writer. The nitty-gritty, hands-on, real-world skills of online content writing aren't taught in college (yet).

I'll agree that a foundational knowledge from college English 101/102 is applicable, if it helps to refine your basic writing skills. Consequently, a journalism degree does help if you choose to write press releases.

But I firmly believe anyone can be self-taught in successful online content writing, to create great content for themselves, or earn a living doing it—with the caveat that they have a passion and talent for writing, because passion and talent will keep them going. I've seen this manifest in my own career.

If you're this kind of writer, but you don't know how to bring your talents online yet, or you want to solidify your knowledge in creating good online content, then my guide is just for you.

I'm giving you such a thorough, definitive guide on online content writing that if you follow it, you'll be ready to write any kind of content that will rank well online and be successful, whether it's for your clients or yourself.

Before we dive in, let me tell you a little about myself, and how I came to be where I am today.

My Story

I'm convinced I was a born writer. I was coming up with story plots at 7 years old. At 9 years old, I started journaling thoughts, poems, and stories, and drawing illustrations to visualize my tales. By age 12, I'd written a 200-

page novel, a medieval fiction about a knight in the Middle Ages that I subsequently lost on a corrupted 3½-inch floppy disk. Darn that floppy! (And I feel so old talking about floppies.)

In combination with my love of writing, I found my roots in internet marketing and entrepreneurship at 12 years old. The internet was born the same year I was born, so I like to think it was destiny (I was born February of 1991, and the internet became available in August of 1991). Homeschooled, I had an early aptitude for the computer, and learned how to use the internet when I was 8.

I still remember when my parents brought home an old IBM Pentium desktop computer that someone had gifted my father, and turned it on. I was there when we turned on the old school, dial-up modem and connected to the internet for the first time, and I'll never forget it. Huddled around the computer, we stared at the Windows internet browser like it was a foreign, shiny alien about to change our lives forever (which it did, of course). My mom hit *send* on an email for the first time, and when she got a reply "through the air," it was unbelievable. (It's funny how old I feel; I'm only in my 20s, but I can remember when the internet was "brand new" to my family and me.)

By the time I turned 12, I was an advanced internet user, picking out the best computers for my parents to purchase on eBay, according to optimal processor speed and type; I learned how to optimize PCs, run anti-virus software and remove almost any virus, and I learned how to build and host websites. My first foray earning money online was when I did online surveys for cash (illegally, of course, because the minimum age to do surveys was 13). I made \$300 in my third month of doing surveys. I also had a short stint as a forum moderator, co-founding a forum along with another 13-year-old internet marketer (he was homeschooled and did online surveys as well).

I started dual enrollment classes at college at 16 years old; during the same year, I started two companies, Julia's Reliable Computer Repair

Services, and J.E. Spence Cleaning. (I was advised by my parents on those names: I'm usually a bit more original than that.) With the first, I made the most income, sometimes \$500 inside a month. I helped elderly neighbors connect to their routers and learn how to use the internet. I have fun memories of one in particular, Mrs. Pepper, who called me often to help her troubleshoot internet and computer issues. I put up flyers in local grocery stores advertising my computer speed-up and tuning services, and I thoroughly enjoyed the odd jobs I got. My second company didn't last long—I designed and ordered 50 advertising flyers, spent an afternoon placing them all over town, landed only one job, and decided that cleaning wasn't that much fun.

I started a writing portfolio when I was 12 on Writing.com, where I uploaded sections of my medieval fiction novel, got peer reviews, and started creating graphics for other users there. I have fond memories of that community: I met many people who encouraged me and helped me hone my writing.

But while I was growing up, I had no idea my calling was to be a writer or an internet marketer. I thought I was supposed to be a nurse, and my parents did too. The dual enrollment college courses I took at 16 were my prerequisites for nursing school. I thoroughly loved the one college English class that I earned an A+ in. At 16, I also started working at McDonald's to earn money for my first cell phone, textbooks, and gas to drive to college. I continued to work at McDonald's for five years; it wasn't fun, but if there's anything I learned from working there, it was how to work hard.

By the time I was 19, I was working full time at McDonald's, while balancing full-time semesters at nursing school. I didn't like either, and each day I was tired, worn out, and not liking my life. Because it ties in, I'll mention here that my personal life was crazy during this time. I was a pastor's daughter; growing up I was only allowed to wear skirts and collared shirts buttoned to the neck, had curfews, strict schedules, and religious practices that included theology readings at 5:30 a.m. We never

owned a TV, weren't allowed to listen to rock music, and had a strict vocabulary (words like "Wow" or "OK" were taboo). My dad also fined my older sister and I monetary amounts if we broke any of his rules.

Given the full-circle picture of just how unhappy I was at 19 years old, you might understand why I wanted to change my life.

And it was as simple as this...

One morning, I woke up to a newsflash just sitting there in my brain.

I didn't have to do what I wasn't happy doing every day.

I turned to my heart for the answer when I asked myself, *what do I love doing?*

Writing, beyond a doubt.

It came naturally to me. When I immersed myself in solitude with a pen, magic hovered in the air. OK, that's a bit imaginative, but really—I absolutely loved to write, and I was great at it. Anytime I took English courses or tests, I scored the highest possible without trying very hard. It wasn't hard because I enjoyed it.

So, I went on the computer (some mornings, at 4 a.m.) and started teaching myself the principles of SEO (search engine optimization), how to write a good web page, how to pick up my typing speed, and some basics of HTML.

I learned and wrote a lot every day. I picked up writing jobs so cheap I won't even name the pay; and there were times when I was writing up to 50 articles in a day, just to get a paycheck at the end of a fortnight to cover all of my bills. My content wasn't that good back then. A lot of it was keyword-stuffed: meaning, all I was given from some clients were a bunch of keywords, and told to write "SEO content." A couple examples: "cash advance Atlanta," "payday loans now Atlanta." Per the client's direction, I couldn't alter (read: correct) the sentence structure and add in grammatically correct prepositions. I had to stuff the phrases in nearly every sentence. It was painful, disjointed writing. Luckily, it wasn't always like

that, and those keyword-stuffed orders became obsolete when I entered 2012.

In March of 2011, I was able to quit McDonald's, because I'd started earning more than I ever had in a week and was swamped with more writing work than I could handle. I was writing all kinds of content: emails; web copy for colleges and businesses; hundreds of articles for a locksmith; and the list went on and on.

These were my crazy days, but looking back, I wouldn't have traded them for the world—this was how I practiced and honed my trade, and achieved the success I have today.

In May of the same year I began my copywriting agency, Express Writers, with a personal investment of \$75 while I was still in nursing school. I coined my business name in less than five minutes, because I needed a way to launch an “agency” profile on oDesk (now Upwork). I never dreamed that little business would grow into the writing agency I have today, or I probably would have spent far more time developing a cooler name. Oh, well: it was much better than the DBA I put on my early Craigslist ads, “Writer4U2Hire.” (Ugh—seriously, what was I thinking?) So, I filed my company name for Express Writers, bought a domain, and got my site hosted. I built my own website with a basic theme, wrote the HTML for it, and handpicked my first three employees on a hired, freelance-contractor basis.

Things were rough: there were many days when I was still typing huge amounts of content for my own marketing and base clients to make an income, besides filling in last minute when my assigned writer didn't show up, which happened quite a bit in the first year. I made crazy targets for myself to hit daily: I was usually up at 4 a.m. just to start the day's worth of marketing to earn new jobs, which included sending 100 emails a day, posting ads on Craigslist, and cold calling SEO agencies I found on Google. I'd sit down to write all the content orders after my marketing was done, around noon. I gave myself the early beginnings of carpal tunnel syndrome;

my hands would lock up in pain at the end of the day from all the typing. I was a hermit working over 60 hours a week to grow this baby, my business. Some nights, I barely slept because my paycheck relied on a client who was late on payment, and it was the money that would support my rent due that week. I went to bed not knowing if I'd be able to pay my bills the next day. But, I was blessed, and things always worked out: my bills were paid, and I survived despite the difficulty and stress of those early days. That year, I netted about \$25,000 with my writing income: tiny, but substantial to me in my first year as an online writer.

I completed a semester of nursing school successfully in 2011, in tandem with running my newly founded Express Writers. But my nursing school grades severely failed in the second semester. Many days, I was forced to choose between filling a content order and getting paid—or studying for the next day's lecture test. At 21 years old, in 2012, I flunked out of nursing school when I failed my second semester of clinical rotations at the UPMC Mercy Hospital in Pittsburgh, PA. My clinical teacher failed me for no specific “wrong reason,” but a lack of passion instead; and she encouraged me to think about doing what I loved. She said I had a sparkle in my eye when I talked about my writing business. Even though that moment where I was told “*you failed*” was one of the hardest moments of my life, I forever hold that teacher in gratitude today. This failure gave me the opportunity to dive headfirst into cultivating Express Writers, which I did, right after I dried my tears.

Eventually with hard work, things got better and easier, and in late 2012 into 2013, I transitioned from being a self-managed company handling single 60+ hour workweeks to a fully staffed company with a management team. No longer would I need to function as a writer, editor, manager, and salesperson—all in a day's work. At the right time, just when I was looking for managers to staff my growing agency, I found two ladies in Europe, sisters, working from home. Together, they had years of journalism and business management experience under their belts, and they were a perfect

fit for my full-time management roles. They are still with me today, guiding and managing our entire writing team and client base.

Since its inception, Express Writers has been quite the journey. Lots of adventures, incredible client relationships, exciting networking, talented team additions hired, and serious growth for me, both business and personal, since I started. I met and married my husband and COO, Josh McCoy, in 2012. We met when he hired me on Upwork—“it’s because you had the prettiest face,” *and*, I was one of the only native-English copywriters at the time. Today, Josh runs our new development and has created the e-commerce system for our Content Shop, a custom-built platform where we offer all our content services, priced and ready to purchase, which launched in January 2015. Now, he’s working with me on our second upcoming brand and team developments.

Along the way, I’ve created writing, editing, and strategy training guides exclusive to my content team, which I continually upgrade to match Google’s ranking guidelines. I’ve also developed an internal role, *Content Strategist*, where I train handpicked team writers to match a need that exists for not only writing great content, but for planning and researching it, too. These internal team skills put Express Writers far ahead of our competitors: we can plan, research, and create best content around the client’s audience (using BuzzSumo), discover and include best keyword recommendations (using SEMrush, Wordtracker, and other tools), among other skills. (And yes—I’m about to share many of these skills with you in the chapters ahead!)



MY GLAMOROUS LIFE. IN THE EARLY DAYS.

Today, our team has more than 70 writers, editors, industry copywriters, journalists, and strategists, among other roles, combined. I have five full-time people on staff to help me run Express Writers now, not counting our staff editors. We've grown huge amounts in our few years of business. In 2012, our first full year of business, when I was the main employee, our gross income was around \$50,000. We grew over 200% every year the next three years, and in 2015, we hit over \$600,000 gross. Today, my company serves more than 1,000 clients worldwide, and sometimes we create as many as 300 pages in one week. Hours and hours of late work, every year, have gone into building and creating who we are today, and where we're at, including three re-launches with new development, pricing, and content product upgrades. (My first "logo" was just Express Writers typed out in Edwardian font. I'm still not sure why I didn't want to change it for almost a year. Hey—at least it wasn't Comic Sans MS.)

I've had some incredibly fun successes this year so far, even though they took a lot of hard work to achieve. In early 2016, I launched a Twitter chat

from scratch, #ContentWritingChat, that happens every week on Tuesdays at 10 a.m. CST hosted on @ExpWriters Twitter account; it hit #42 most popular on Twitter during the very first week we launched it, and has continued to grow and bring in a large community weekly. I launched a new podcast, The Write Podcast, in late March 2016, and it hit New & Noteworthy in Business News on iTunes within 36 hours of its launch! And, of course, writing this very book you're about to read, which has been by far my most difficult task to date in my career.

Throughout the journey, we've been 100% personally funded, with no outside investors. And we have big things ahead for this little content company—we're about to launch Express Writers 2.0 this year! By mid-2016, we're launching a custom-built team room that's taken over a year to develop; new content products with better internal pay scales for our writers, increased rates, and more. Plus, my COO and I are working in the background on two more content-related brands.

If I were to share my “secret growth hacks”...

- It's a lot of hard work, late nights, brainstorming, and strategizing to get ahead of the competition.
- It's a focus and commitment towards constant growth. Always finding a way to do better, day in, day out.

I'm also blessed to have incredibly passionate team members aboard my ship who have helped my business stay afloat, grow, and maintain its success. I seriously love hiring people who share my passion for creating and distributing great content. And I've never lost focus on constantly improving the work produced by our team. We don't allow our quality standards to drop, no matter how bleak and difficult hiring occasionally gets (our entrance testing is a two-step, rigorous testing process). We refine or remove anything that hinders our work, or lowers our quality.

I'm constantly, tirelessly studying, adapting, and learning as I go—from

the entire process of how I shaped my career in online writing to launching a Twitter chat and podcast from scratch.

This learning and growing process is, to me, like a *heartbeat*.

And, I absolutely love sharing what I know! In this book, I'm writing down all the knowledge I've acquired after a very fast-paced half decade in the online content world. I've gone from being a single freelance writer to a content agency owner with a 99.9% satisfied client feedback ratio, among over a thousand worldwide clients—and in this book I'm going to share the tactics, or rather, fundamentals, that made my journey a success.

Ready? Let's roll!

I.

Starting Grounds

Success in online writing, both monetary and in the subsequent value and ranking of great web content, can happen for any passionate writer and brand given the opportunity to learn the tricks of the online writing trade.

The tough part is there's no one easy course to sign up for that teaches you all of the tricks you need to know to succeed. I was completely self-taught, and I picked up some of my best skills by learning them on the job as I wrote online content for my clients. (Not what I'd suggest for everyone.)

I think that essential writing skills are born from a passion that surfaces at a young age. This passion can't be taught, and it's the starting point of what it takes to be a stellar content creator and copywriter.

My starting grounds can be traced back to writing fiction when I was nine years old. Many professional copywriters, probably more than half, dabble in fiction when the mood strikes them.

Writing fiction maintains and sharpens the base skills of creative writing.

When we grow up telling stories, it's only natural that we incorporate pieces of them into our current writing.

And guess what?

Fiction writing is the fertile ground where some of the greatest storytelling genius is born and cultivated.

A passion for storytelling, born at an early age, can blossom into amazing online content writing skills at a later age, and thus translate into well-developed copywriting chops for the world's most successful brands.

Ordinary Writers Doing Extraordinary Things

Storytelling comes from showing reality from a different perspective. It can be summed up that simply.

An interesting, unique point of view can really draw a person in, and when you combine that identifiable point of view with a good story to tell, you transform that story into an extension of someone's life.

A good story in advertising copy makes the person witnessing it subconsciously think, "*Gee, that sounds like (or could be) ME!*"

How was that emotion pulled out? By a story told so well that it became relatable and *real*. Very often, that person goes on to become a customer for the company that drew them in and related to them on a personal level.

Although storytelling styles and media have changed over time, the idea that a good story appeals to the audience is timeless: it's why we still tell our kids stories adapted from 16th-century German fairy tales.



STORYTELLERS AND THEIR GIFT OF CAPTIVATION.

The “story” is, in itself, a timeless art form. Once upon a time, stories were used as a means of promoting discourse. Socrates presented his

thoughts to the public in the form of fables. Many ancient Greek and Roman philosophers (such as Euclid and Plato) used to couch their factual knowledge in storytelling.¹

And you know what? Stories stick. Who remembers the first grade fairy tale rather than the sixth grade geography or math lesson? Me, too.

It goes to show that a relatable “story” is often remembered far more accurately, and much more vividly, than drier content pushed down our throats as rote memorization.

This persistence of memory is another reason why the “story” has taken root in modern-day advertising. Storytelling allows us to bring the audience into the front seat and, at times, make each person feel like the most important person in the room.

Nothing is as memorable as a show put on *just for you*...unless it's a show that is *starring you*.

In our attempts at storytelling, we try to put the audience in the driver's seat and have them experience the feelings and emotions that an ordinary person would feel in such a position. Like the myriad of writers that came before us, from Herodotus to Shakespeare, we continue to carry on the timeless work of telling stories.

What Are the Online Writer's Stories Made Of?

Now obviously, online copywriters don't write the kinds of stories found in books. You just won't see a guy staring at a full-page ad and reading it like a novel, enjoying its use of double entendre. Maybe we'll get there one day—when every single one of us enjoys the fabulous art of reading entire volumes voraciously—but I highly doubt that's likely. Our attention spans are currently dwindling, not growing, according to research.²

So, the way an online writer builds a story is a little different. While a fictional writer has a toolbox full of plots, devices, and character portraits,

the content writer has a trunk full of information about whom they want to reach, and the most effective way to do it.

We begin by researching our audience first and foremost before we even start writing.

A fiction writer starts with the premise, and then finds the audience; but the copywriter starts with the audience and then generates the premise. And they create a story that sells, to that audience.

There are a number of different success tales in businesses (both large and small) that testify to the usefulness of the “story” as a marketing tool. Recent trends in marketing have shown that combining the idea of a story to *teach* the audience something has a far greater impact on final sales.³

As entertaining as a story is, if it doesn’t sell, then it isn’t successful from a marketing perspective. So, are there limits to storytelling? Will a story ever detract from a message you need to get across to a potential customer in order to sell him or her?

Enter the following example: marketing storytelling so good, it sold *crap*. Literally.

An Example of Storytelling Success in Marketing: Poo~Pourri

Recently, I came across an example of brand storytelling so good, it blew my mind. It was an ad by the brand Poo~Pourri on YouTube. This 3:05-minute video captured me and held my attention the entire time (yes, it interrupted the writing of this book).

The video opens with a beautiful English redheaded girl drinking tea and eating baked goods with her lady friends. She suddenly experiences the passing of gas, looks into the camera, and says:

“My butt-trumpet is about to blow—and when the chocolate éclair

spreads my hot cross buns, no one will ever know! It's time to go down the crappit hole, where smelling is believing!"

The viewer then proceeds to get flushed down a toilet into a music video where people are doing yoga and simultaneously singing about crap with their heads between their legs.

Did that just make you say *what*?

And then immediately want to know more?

The maker of this (newer) brand sold no less than *four million* products, to date, and I think the magic of their storytelling is a primary reason. You can view the wondrous crappy story for yourself at poopourri.com. The product itself is basically an odor-killer spritz to spray in the toilet before you poop, that “magically” traps all the crappy smells in the toilet so they never make it into the air.

The copywriting all throughout Poo~Pourri's site screams creative storytelling. Read this description for the “Deja Poo” product:

white flowers + citrus

pooetry:

*there once was a hippie named True,
bathroom odor made her blue.
now her stars are aligned,
with a spritz every time,
and her karma cosmically grew.*

And check out the first Q/A from their FAQ page:

Q: I just used Poo~Pourri for the first time, and my poopin' life has forever been changed. I want to shake hands with the smarty-pants who invented it—after I wash them, of course. Who on Earth thought of this stuff?!

A: As legend has it, Poo~Pourri was created by a magical fairy named Stinkerbell in an enchanted world far, far away. As truth has it, Poo~Pourri was invented by a stink-hatin' gal named Suzy Batiz in a

smelly bathroom near Dallas, Texas. To see the story of Poo in less than 90 seconds, give this video a looksee!

Even their unique, illustrative design and product names (Déjà Poo, Poo La La, Trap-A-Crap, to name just three out of 20+ products), all flow in sync with the creative storyline. They are currently selling a 2-oz bottle starting around \$9.95, plus shipping.



Now that's a crazily creative story worth telling, sharing—and by golly, *selling*. (Four million poopy products and counting.) See how they got me to write about it? I found them and fell in love—I was not even marketed to.

Make Your Story Educating & Entertaining

The above example is so crazy good, it's out of this world. Literally—I haven't seen a better tale in marketing. If you can nail a story that creative,

then my hat is off to you. Not every brand will be able to come up with that amount of successful crappy puns (pun-intended).

So even if you can't be the next Poo~Pourri, here's how you should be using the hugely important element of storytelling in your content.

The overall aim of our online storytelling should be to *educate* and *entertain* (and from that, naturally, sell).

Educating validates the idea of a value-based content system (what Google and readers love today). Success for the online marketer is found in copy that isn't aimed at a hard sell, but instead, offers something that truly helps the reader. This will naturally attract warm leads out of your visitors, instead of pushing them away. And *entertaining* is simply your desired and achievable level of creativity—however far you want to go to make your story entertain your fans (on a 1 to Poo~Pourri level).

With a truly useful, educational, entertaining storyline, and consistent content output (regular blogs, videos, or other content types), you'll draw in warm leads that will keep reading your content, because it gives them an answer or solves their problems. And these leads are much more likely to buy your product than the readers faced with a cold sell.

This is *big news* for us writers.

Since a whopping 40% or more of the world's population now has access to the internet, which means there are more than three billion people online, internet marketing is the primary advertising avenue for all businesses.⁴ More than eight new people get online every second, and over 139,000 new websites go live every day (based on 2013 statistics).⁵ Forty-six percent of people read blogs more than once a day, and 82% of marketers who blog daily gain a customer from their blogs.⁶ Adobe has reported that internet TV will be replacing traditional cable television, with internet video viewing growing by 388% annually, and cable TV seeing the lowest number of viewers today than it has ever seen.⁷

I could cite stats all day long, but the point is, if you're in business, your best audience is found online.

And the foundation of all online marketing is *good content*.

Fundamentally, good storytelling is the key to writing content that excels. Then, add to this strong, underlying foundation a mix of SEO knowledge, research skills, and the ability to thoroughly address all of your readers' questions. Learning to create captivating headlines that correctly reflect what the content is about is another important "tool" in your skillset. (This described process is also what I'm about to teach you in my book!)

This approach is already working. Numbers don't lie. Companies such as General Electric⁸ and Red Bull⁹ have utilized the medium of storytelling in a bold new way, giving their viewers and readers stories *informing* as opposed to *selling*. (Go read and watch some of the media on their websites if you want to be inspired.) And as I showed, there are brands like Poo~Pourri taking storytelling to the next creative level and simply selling through the power of an astoundingly fun brand.

Providing useful, engaging content is the new face of marketing. If you're aware of this concept and can manage to blend storytelling with useful information, then you're well on your way to becoming a first-class content creator.

And once you've had some experience in storytelling, whether it is making up fables on the fly for your kid brother, eating up volumes of beautiful fiction tales at a time, or writing a lengthy essay you enjoyed creating for your middle-school teacher, you probably have the skills for this type of content.

Truth be told, I personally find it easier to write from an ad or targeted online copy perspective than writing from a fictional perspective. Fiction gives you a lot of freedom to experiment, but too much of a good thing means you have no limits or boundaries, and it's very easy to wander "off-message." In contrast, online copy almost every time has defined guidelines to work within, and although you are challenged to think outside the box (where really *good* ideas are born), it's highly unlikely that you'll end up doing something "wrong" if you stay within the guidelines while exercising

your writing talents and skills. In this type of writing, once you understand the instructions, it's impossible to stray off the beaten path, fall off a cliff, or wander into the weeds.

II.

How Online Content Writing Is Taking Over the Marketing World



Today, online content writing is a killer dynamic industry.

Any competent online writer can now earn an income. On the flip side, marketers and businesses can achieve increased traffic, leads, and sales in a fantastic way—by publishing great content that answers questions, provides useful information, and is engaging.

With millions of dollars per year now budgeted for content marketing, and the new role of CCO (Chief Content Officer)¹ popping up as a vitally important full-time position in all kinds of companies, this field is growing.

More and more businesses are coming to realize the importance of having a consistent supply of high-quality content flowing from their companies to engage their viewers, visitors, and customers. Providing online content that

is useful and original is fundamentally a key to maintaining a competitive advantage in search rankings. Content provides greater scope and depth, as well as a means of both outreach to (example: blog post), and feedback from (example: blog comments), consumers.

The internet has become an invaluable tool for businesses that market both to consumers as well as to other businesses. In turn, high-quality content publications (blogs, web pages, resource articles, and other content types) allow a business to achieve the marketing goals it deems necessary in the short term, while preparing itself for a long-term investment in its chosen marketing channel.

Writing online content varies in complexity. Some content production tasks require a detailed knowledge of the field you're writing about. Other content production requires only a general familiarity with the area you're producing for. Regardless of the field you're writing about, it's important to know your audience well, and to utilize SEO writing tactics. Depending on the depth of knowledge required, your content writing difficulty will vary.

Let's delve in.

1. The Development of Online Content Marketing & Writing

In the late '90s, internet startups were THE rage. (And where I live—near Austin, Texas—you might as well say they're still the rage.) You couldn't go five steps in any of the big tech regions without meeting someone who was an internet startup guru or entrepreneur. And this phenomenon opened up a constant flow of new traffic to marketers. The internet had presented itself as a means of communication, and by default, a means of marketing.

Early Internet Content Culture

Early adopters of the internet startup culture didn't have to do much in terms of putting together a functional, searchable web page, one that drew

users in solely through the quality and frequency of their content and how well it ranked in search engine results.

The term “content marketing” wasn’t used in full force until 2001, when the founder of the Content Marketing Institute, Joe Pulizzi,² began using the term regularly with the following definition:

Content marketing is a strategic marketing approach focused on creating and distributing valuable, relevant, and consistent content to attract and retain a clearly-defined audience — and, ultimately, to drive profitable customer action.

(Source: <http://contentmarketinginstitute.com/what-is-content-marketing/>)

Back in the early decades of the internet, creating and publishing online content was little more than simply picking your top keywords and stuffing them everywhere on the page—not so attractive.

But that was before Google, and when early search engine algorithms were less advanced. Back then, the algorithms simply judged the usefulness of a site based on how many times a particular search keyword showed up on said site. Eventually, though, this led to a lot of grief and frustration for users.

Marketers were so happy to jump on the keyword-stuffing bandwagon that they led to the demise of their own gravy train. Users began moving away from search engines that gave them rubbish results, and instead, turned selectively to a search engine that used a more streamlined search algorithm and provided more relevant results.

Google was born in September 1998,³ but it was far from the powerful search engine giant we all know today. The thing going for it, however, was that it had all the right foundation elements: Google’s search algorithm ranked pages based on both relevance *and* authority. Although the late ’90s passed without Google actually being a threat to internet marketers and their penchant for keyword-stuffing, change was on the horizon.

In the late 2000s, Google started an all-out war on internet marketers’

shady practices (bad SEO, also known as “black hat SEO”).⁴ Gone were the days of high search engine rankings for pages that were all fluff and no substance. There was no longer a possibility of “winning” at “ranking easily” by doing black hat practices. You couldn’t spin a few shady links and get a website to the top of Google anymore. What’s more, Google not only didn’t rank, but penalized sites for doing black hat practices. And many times, it was really, really hard to remove those penalties and ever rank again. You’d usually have to start with a whole new domain. Even the direct business owner, who may have had little web experience, started realizing that they would have to create content and blog for themselves, since black hat marketers started getting websites flagged or completely de-ranked by Google (translate: a lot of angry customers).

Instead, content that was *loved by the end user* was rewarded. Citational content—the type of content that earned links naturally, because people liked it—was the winner in the rankings. Content was ranked based on its relevance (including long-tail keywords, naturally used and relevant to the overall topic on the site), and the authority of the site and its links.

So, online marketers began to increase their activity and content creation with the opposite viewpoint, or “white hat SEO”—above-board tactics that included creating fresh, original content, engaging in social media, publishing a variety of content types, and more. Stuffing pages with keywords aimed solely at top search engine rankings became a tactic of the past.

Today: Google Says “Yes” to Quality Content

Fast-forward to 2011, when Google’s intense Panda and Penguin algorithm updates dealt the last blow to a large volume of black hat SEO internet marketing sites.⁵ These algorithm updates built upon Google’s work to create a more relevant search engine, and at the same time, penalized sites which hosted poor content.

Here’s a little rundown on these two crucial updates:



—**Google Panda:** Launched February of 2011, this algorithm update affected a whopping 12% of the web. Its purpose was to promote high-quality sites, and find and demote low-quality sites. It was nicknamed “Farmer” because it affected content farms, which were sites that stole content from all around the web just to get a large amount of pages and rank well for keywords. Thin content, or pages with very low word amounts, were demoted; sites with more ads than content were penalized; duplicate and low-quality content was de-ranked by the algorithm.

—**Google Penguin:** Launched April of 2012, the Penguin update focused on penalizing sites that were using links to cheat and gain on their rankings unnaturally. Those that spun a bunch of links with their keyword anchor text, i.e. “payday loan Las Vegas,” and posted those over and over inside articles, directory listings, or forum posts, were discovered and penalized. Anyone who was ranking using those “black hat” tactics suffered: the algorithm update hit hard, and those who purged out or removed all their bad links still had to wait six months for the algorithm to refresh and flush out their bad linking history.

Because of these quality-focused updates, if website owners wanted to rank at the top, they had no choice but to conform to the quality standards.

Circa 2015, Google launched their Search Quality Evaluator Guidelines,⁶ revealing that for a while now they've had *real people* (“evaluators”) grading the web on a series of parameters that were finally defined within the massive document. It's crazy: I imagine a lineup not unlike Ford's assembly line, but with real people sitting down at computers, evaluating a lineup of websites.

Google has dedicated its updates to ranking websites that produce good content—original, relevant stuff. For those who maintain a consistent output of this quality content, they will be rewarded with the growth of good rankings.

The search engine giant's updates have spawned entire industries in analytics and search engine optimization—and the race for the best goes to whomever has the highest quality content.

For us, Google's ongoing high-quality standards have created a self-sustaining industry in online content writing.

2. The Idea of Good Online Writing

So, given the weight Google has in deciding which sites make the cut—I mean, it only ranks or de-ranks you—what does good writing look like in Google's eyes?

This is a loaded question. In reality, good content isn't something that's easily stuffed into a box and labeled. But, here are a few important features:

Good online writing:

- Appeals to the audience it's written for
- Gives the audience something useful
- Is in-depth
- Uses relevant keywords naturally
- Informs the reader
- Challenges the reader
- Provides the reader with a takeaway message/key point
- Answers the reader's most important question(s)

These main features fundamentally describe successful online content.

Good writing is the backbone for all content, both short and long-form, on the internet today. A piece of good writing seeks to communicate ideas and helps the reader understand a topic. It gives them insight into a particular subject or question, or makes them privy to information that they previously didn't know. And, good content writing also includes the appropriate keywords for which the user was searching.

Three Companies Relying on Good Writing to Grow Their Brands

Over the past few years, more and more big-brand companies have begun capitalizing on the idea of good writing as a means of developing their business. Here are just a few.

1. Airbnb. This company won Inc.'s 2014 Company of the Year Award⁷ for good reason. They are simply amazing at producing content that people love, from one of the thousands of location-based landing pages they publish to the dynamic blog they run. Not to mention the human-centric video commercials they produce. Sure, this multi-media approach involves more than just online content writing: but at their core is...guess what? Good *storytelling*, in written concepts. It's the foundation beneath all the varied distribution and media types.

If you take a look at Airbnb's blog, you'll see what I mean. The home blog feed is simply a large gallery of imagery, with titles that appear on hover. And when you click around, you'll see intense blog posts with thousands of words, and more than one piece of full-width, beautiful photography for every post.



Screenshot of blog.airbnb.com

2. Medium. Currently, Medium is one of the “reading hubs” on the internet. I think of it as a virtual library. It has a lot of great content, published as “stories,” and written by a wide variety of well-known guest publishers and authors.

Medium positioned itself as an industry leader in long-form content right from the start. By inviting qualified, well-known, reputable authors to write for Medium, they set themselves up as an authority in the industry. They demonstrated that long-form content isn't just alive—it's *marketable*.

When Medium was released to the general public, its authors benefitted from the visibility and traffic they gained from their Medium posts. Content on this platform is definitely considered a cut above the rest. Gary Vaynerchuk, Google's team, the Red Cross, Buffer, and a variety of business owners, marketers, authors, and even millionaires have published content on Medium.



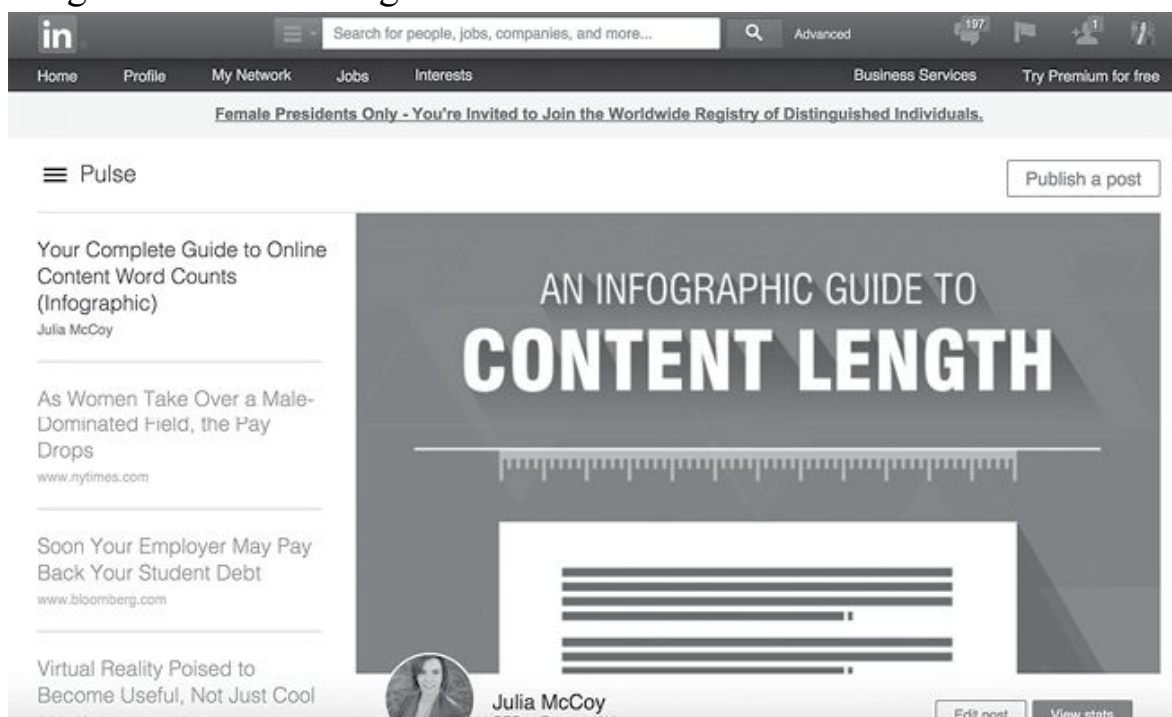
Screenshot of medium.com

For a long time prior to Medium coming out, a relative opinion online was that long-form content was a thing of the past. It was common to hear that “people don’t read anymore,” and “attention spans are much too short” for long-form content to be marketable. Well, Medium proved that the power of good writing could absolutely make long-form content interesting enough to be viable as a marketing strategy. It’s a lesson many other companies have since taken to heart.

3. LinkedIn. LinkedIn started offering a content publishing platform in the form of LinkedIn Pulse, what they describe as something “in-between a blog and social network.” As of 2015, over 50,000 pieces of content were

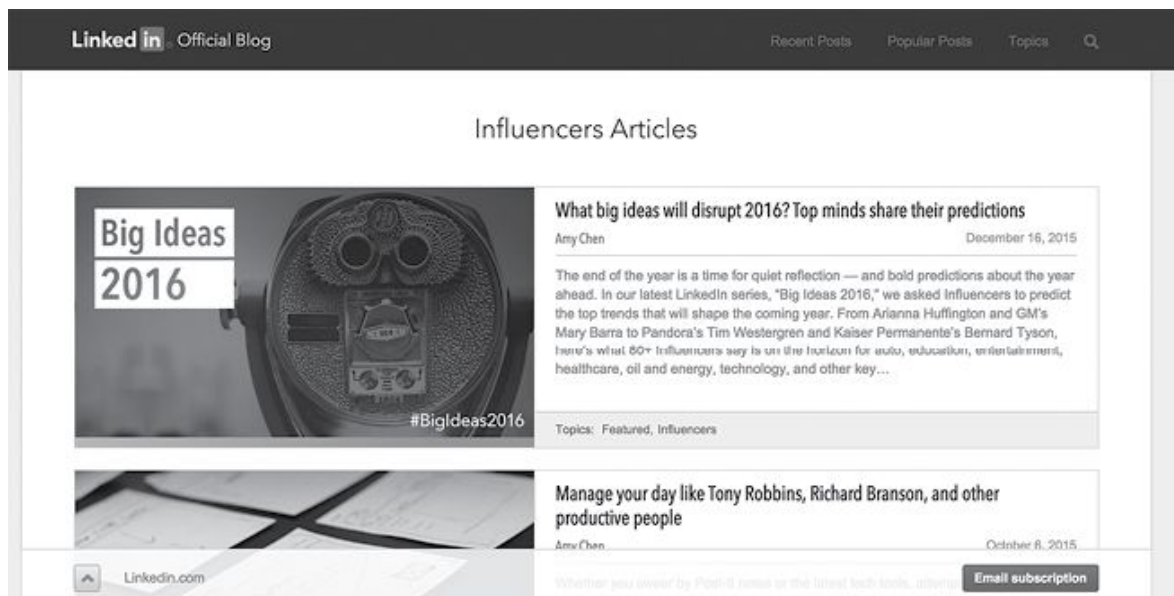
published by LinkedIn Pulse authors every week.⁸ I typically publish a post here at least once a month; it's an amazing way to get direct LinkedIn users eyeballing your content.

Good content, published regularly by LinkedIn authors, helps to attract more users to LinkedIn, while at the same time giving the site a ready pool of high-quality content that keeps it at the top of the rankings for business social networks. This is a compelling argument for how good writing is taking over the marketing world.



Screenshot of <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/your-complete-guide-online-content-word-counts-julia-mccoy>

LinkedIn also has an “Influencer Articles” category that collects the “influencers” from LinkedIn Pulse and their best writing into one category, run by an official LinkedIn blog moderator. Getting featured here has the potential for huge exposure.



Screenshot of <http://blog.linkedin.com/topic/influencers/>

Note: I wouldn't recommend using Medium or LinkedIn as your *only* place of publishing. It would work best as another channel included in your content distribution, where you publish additional articles.

Besides LinkedIn and Medium, even more platforms are converging to offer a place to publish long-form content—and we're talking some of the most popular social platforms online. Facebook Articles recently launched, and the word is that it will be open to the public—not just select publishers—in April 2016.² Twitter has even mentioned working on a new feature that will allow users to tweet past the current 140-character limit.¹⁰

Many, many more platforms and businesses than just these three examples I've given are relying on good content, especially *long-form content*, to grow. And my own company is one of them. Since its inception in 2011 through today, I've published over 700 blog posts on my WordPress site, expresswriters.com, many of which are over 1,500 words. When The Write Podcast came out, we took this as an opportunity to publish even more content: I added transcriptions and show notes for each episode to our site, which is garnering us new traffic and rankings since. Each episode transcription, published as blog posts on WordPress, is around 5,000 words! Besides that, we also have an additional 50+ pages of web content

published on our site, combining our service pages, product descriptions, and main pages.

Today, through our online content efforts (which we continually upkeep—a full-time job), we hold over 4,000 keyword rankings in Google, with over 200 keywords in the top 10 positions on Google—all achieved through our organic (non-sponsored) published content. Here's a screenshot from SEMrush valuing our organic content traffic at \$12,200 per month (what we would pay Google to get these results through sponsored ads):



It's truly incredible what you can achieve through the consistent publication of top-notch, useful, thorough long-form online content.

Get ready to see the growth and surge of all kinds of content platforms—and businesses—that rely on content in all its forms to grow online in the coming months.

How Does Google Influence Online Writing?

As I said before, good writing must give the user something back. It must enhance their lives somehow.

Google's algorithm updates are leaning towards a value-based system, to determine if a piece of content on a page is relevant to a user. So, how does Google determine if a piece of writing passes muster?

Well, this is a process defined as *search engine optimization*, or SEO in

industry jargon—what I defined a little earlier back.

Here's further good news for us content writers: the entire process of SEO is *heavily reliant* on good content.

Google uses a series of indexing parameters to determine the relevancy of web pages. In itself, SEO represents a means of classifying a page based on its content, taking into account keywords that are referred to within the content, and whether they are used in context. It also incorporates information such as incoming and outgoing links (as well as rating the page based on the pages it links to) and analyzes the relevancy of the keywords distributed throughout the content.

A well-trained online writer knows how to balance the spirit of the content with some appropriate use of keywords, without overdoing the SEO portion.

Not only is good online content written and optimized for search engines, but it should also be *engaging, useful* and *readable* to the real person searching for answers on that topic. You don't just want the robots of Google crawling your content, you want actual human engagement: comments, shares, and, of course, conversion to your message.

It's a learned art, even for the best writer.

And just like any other type of writing, your first attempts at different types of online writing can be difficult. With practice, however, you will begin to see the nuances of producing high-quality online writing that appeals to a broad audience.

Your initial step is to *know your audience*, keeping in mind that one of your most important audience members is Google itself—because Google ranks the actual content you write so that human users can see it.

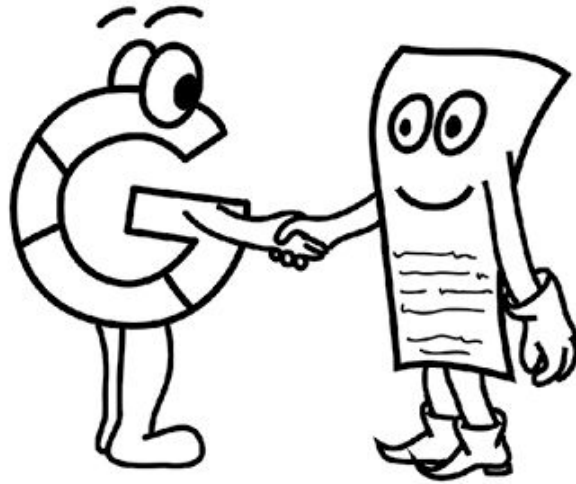
Learning from your mistakes is part of being a good writer, regardless of the medium. It's a long road, but it's so worth the journey. I sincerely think that very few professions are as rewarding as writing great copy. OK, being a heart surgeon...a mother...father...firefighter—they're all just as, if not

more, rewarding. But there's something about writing and publishing great online content that is *very* fulfilling. If you follow and put my guide to use, you'll find out very soon what that's like!

Ready to start learning the art of SEO and understand how it fits into online content creation? Let's proceed!

III.

The Role of SEO in Online Content Writing & How to Use Keywords



In this chapter, I'm going to demonstrate how to use SEO concepts and online optimization skills as you write copy for the web.

First, let's review my list of the seven essential types of online content:

In essence, online content falls into one of these seven different categories:

1. **Web Content**
2. **Blogging**
3. **Social Media**
4. **Advertising/Sales Copy**
5. **Industry Writing**
6. **Journalism**
7. **Creative Writing**

Don't worry right now about how to create each different type, that's covered in my next chapter.

Let's focus on which of these seven types of content will specifically require you to use SEO knowledge and skills.

Fortunately, SEO strategies aren't critical for every single type. But with these four, it is usually important to have a thorough understanding of SEO writing skills:

- **Web Content**
- **Blogging**
- **Journalism (online press releases)**
- **Industry writing, creative writing, sales copy (sometimes)**

In social media, *people* matter more than keywords, so you'll never optimize social content for SEO.

You might be using keywords in ad copy, but the audience will be your focus there, too.

And in journalism, you'll only use keywords sparingly, inside press

releases.

SEO can apply to both industry writing and creative writing, only if the client requests (for example, technical writing could be necessary for an IT-related ebook, which isn't optimized for SEO; or for a web page, which *is* optimized for SEO).

Now that you know which types of content SEO generally applies to, let's talk about what you should know in order to create good, high-quality SEO content.

Since SEO involves the use of *keywords* in content...

What are keywords? In a nutshell, keywords are words or phrases that highlight the topic you are writing about. Selecting the right keywords for your SEO content is just as important as having the correct balance of them in your overall text.

Why SEO Content Must Be Good Content

SEO, which we defined earlier as *search engine optimization*, is the use of particular keywords and phrases within the content of a site in order to give search engine robots an idea of what the site itself contains and how to rank that site properly. Originally, keywords were the single most important factor, or metric, for ranking well in search results. For example, back then, if you had a site that was about your new payday loan office that opened up in Dallas, all you had to do was to ensure that the term “payday loan Dallas” and its synonyms appeared often enough in your web content to get them ranking well in search results.

In the late '90s and early '00s, it was common practice to simply stuff the keywords¹ anywhere they could fit in order to ensure that the search index robots were able to figure out what you were marketing. It was sort of like “shouting” your keywords at the search engine bot, and if you shouted hard enough and often enough, it would rank you well in search results. For many site owners in that era, this actually worked.

The obvious fallout with this stuffing practice was that when you visited a site with every sentence chock full of a particular keyword, you couldn't expect to get any real information about the product or the company selling it, or even enjoy reading the content much less want to share it.

It was a lose-lose situation for a user, and eventually, for the webmaster promoting this “stuffed” type of content. When Google launched its algorithm updates (refer to Chapter II, section 1, *The Development of Online Content Marketing & Writing* for the whole story on that), sites that had consistently topped the search rankings with keyword-stuffed content got penalties that dropped them 50 or 100 spots lower in Google rankings—overnight. Webmasters cried. But it was for the benefit of the entire web, because quality sites, or those that granted usable, truly helpful content to readers, began to skyrocket to the top of the search listings.

Today, good content takes the cake if you want to rank well in Google's search engine. And as the content on the web increases, like a huge sea, you're going to have to have *really* good content to maintain and grow visibility.

For this chapter, we'll talk about the foundation of good content as it relates to Google: understanding and utilizing the basics of search engine optimization in your online writing.

Using the principles of SEO in your online content writing is a key to getting your content to the first page of search rankings.

For all content that should be indexable to the search engines, whether blogs, web pages, or resource articles, you'll want to always write with search engine tactics in mind. That way, you can get superior ranking results from the content you write for yourself or for a client, and subsequently, your content will be seen on the web—which is your ultimate goal with content published online.

*Google Is Getting Close to Human (or,
Why You Should Write for Humans)*

Google has gotten so good that, today, the answers their algorithm displays to the searcher have risen to a human level. And remember—Google is now using real humans to evaluate websites (refer to Chapter II, section on *Today: Google Says “Yes” to Quality Content*).

If we create optimized, thorough, accurate content that answers questions *at a human level*, then Google will rank us well for that corresponding human question.

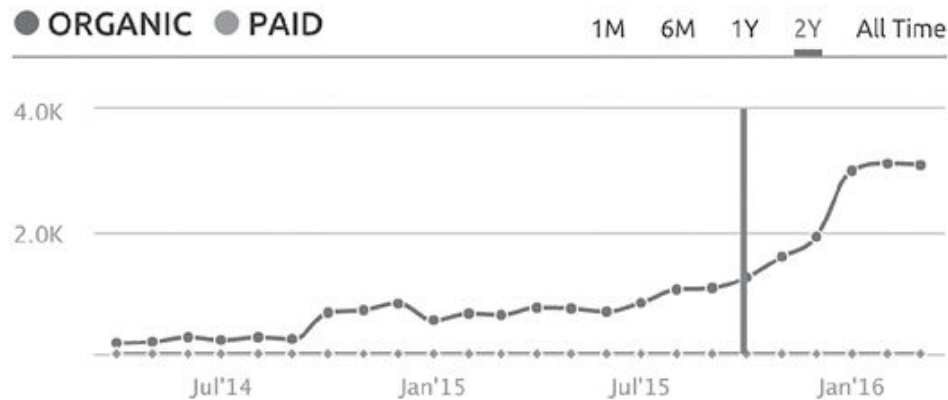
It’s fairly simple, if you think about it. Write and create something that’s truly worth our time to read and share, and you’ll be rewarded with results.

The best way to get real, sustainable links is to write content that others in your field are willing to link to as “the” official answer to that question/problem. In a sea of content, only the highest level of written expert content will fit that bill today.

This has been my adage for a while now. I’m always working on bringing our own published content up to a higher standard for my audience; we’ve trained our best SEO expert writers to contribute to our content, worked internally on exclusive rules and guidelines, and invested in various content forms besides just blogs, infographics, gifographics, image subscriptions, and branded visuals.

This year, I’ve committed myself to writing and publishing the *best content I’ve ever written* on our own blog and for my guest blog channels, investing hours a day in just writing headlines and refining my voice inside the written post, and utilizing all the resources in our team. And, I’ve never seen my published content reach this level of success before, in terms of sharing, engagement, and rankings.

Check out my screenshot (via SEMrush) of our traffic across the last two years—notice specifically how high the graph goes up for this year. (More on how to use one of my favorite tools, SEMrush, is coming up in Chapter III.)



The quality of your content *emphatically relates* to how well your site, your rankings, your traction in links/sharing, lead generation from your content, and your overall presence does online.

*To be the best at your content, ask yourself as you write:
how can you be the best answer to your audience's
questions?*

What information that you exclusively know *fully* answers their *biggest* questions?

What takeaway message fulfills their needs?

What style, tone, or voice will appeal to them the most?

Besides focusing on your audience and your voice of expertise when you write, it's important to be aware of the factors that affect Google's search results and know how we can write to influence search engines to rank the content we write, highly.

To accomplish a goal of high visibility with our content, we must be able to understand how search engine optimization works, and *trust flow* and *citation flow* can help.

The Flow Metrics: A New Search Paradigm

The flow metrics, trust and citation flow, are factors that make the content

writer's job especially vital to website owners, and they're worth a brief mention here.

Trust flow was coined and trademarked by Majestic, an SEO tool and the world's largest link index database.² It directly relates to the trustworthiness, or "power," of a website. *Citation flow*, also coined by Majestic, refers to how powerful a site is based on its link value (how many other sites link to it). Citation flow can often be inaccurate, though, if a bunch of spammy links are pointing to the website. Also, it may not boost trust flow, but trust flow will almost always increase citation flow. Domain authority is another factor to keep in mind. Developed by Moz³ and commonly abbreviated DA, it is a score based on a 100-point scale that usually increases in tandem with a website's rise in trust and citation flow.

Your website's *trust flow* is the main quality factor metric here. For example, if you had a ton of links pointing to your site that weren't of any quality, you might have a rise in citation flow, but not in trust flow, since those low-quality links won't improve your overall good standing in trust flow. Authoritative and influential links are the most important type of links in Google's eyes; and this directly relates to the amount of quality, authoritative content you publish.

Now, how do you go about getting those links? Back in 2011, I saw a lot of "schemes" around "link-building," and it was treated as something technical. Not so much, today. I haven't ever worried about trying to "buy" or "build" a link since I started blogging. I've been focused on writing, creating, and producing great content instead.

It's as simple as *the better content you have, the more people will want to link to it and share it, and the higher your possibility of getting a great backlink.*

What will your reader find truly useful, informative, and an accurate match to their question? Take that to the next level, and ask: what will blow them out of the water that features *your* exclusive insight, drawing on your background expertise or something you have a passion in? Think like that,

and you'll almost always produce content Google (and the people linking to and sharing your stuff) will like.

Related to trust flow is one more term, *topical trust flow*, which is all about whether a site has a lot of good content that relates to its *topic*. You can't toss up any non-relevant content on your site now—it has to be related to your site, and to the product or service you offer.

<p>Trust flow: Indicator of how trustworthy a page is</p> <p>Citation flow: How popular a site is based on link value (may not reflect true site value)</p> <p>Topical trust flow: Amount of good content that relates to the topic of a site</p>
--

I won't bore you with too many more geeky SEO details here, but in a nutshell, PageRank (PR) was previously the metric used to measure and value websites. Now, PR has been mostly replaced by trust flow and citation flow.

The biggest difference between SEO today versus when I started, back in 2010, is that the whole process of optimizing for search engines is more about *quality* than *quantity*. In 2010, all you needed was the most amount of links pointing to your site. Now, the quality of the link itself is more what Google looks for: you need stable, reliable, and steady link sources that are relevant to your site and topics, and that will stay relevant for years to come.

Trust flow is an opportunity for the online writer.

Why? To sum it up, higher authority links are more sought after than ever—and the best content has the best chance of getting high authority links.

So these technical terms, when it comes down to it, reflect a culture on the web today that is all about *real trust*—simply stated, how good your content

is directly relates to how much it will be linked to, talked about, shared, *trusted*, and thusly, ranked well in Google.

The Evergreen Phenomenon

Since this paradigm shift I've just described has occurred, website owners who want to rank well need the creative geniuses of online writers to put together not only good material, but also relevant topics and content suggestions... more than ever before.

And you know what else ties in?

Evergreen content. This is a common term you'll hear in SEO and web marketing nowadays. This is *content that is always relevant and "fresh" for readers*. Like the evergreen tree, evergreen content is lasting and self-sustaining. I'd go further, and define this as content that is at least 1,500 words: is *not* seasonal, is *not* timely, and is *not* newsy. Evergreen content usually comes best in the form of how-to guides and thorough, informative answer posts.

And there is a *need* for this content today: that's why I call it a phenomenon. Let me substantiate that claim with an example.

Let's say you're searching on Google for a guide on *how to trim my eyebrows*. The first result is a five-minute video, which you skip because a) it's not informative enough or b) you're in a quiet environment (like your workplace) and can't play audio. Your next choices are a blog post that's about two paragraphs long and is on a site that sells eyebrow-waxing products; or a guide that looks to be about 2,000 words, full of visuals and real DIY-steps to help you do it yourself.

Which one do you choose to teach yourself how to trim your eyebrows?

The answer is clear, and that 2,000-word piece that just taught you *how* to solve your question, with pictures, can be considered evergreen content. It's a *killer* tool in the content marketing toolbox.

Find out which of your keywords and topics can be turned into thorough guides for your readers, and make it a priority to work on those. Cover

every single thing you can think of in that piece of content. Don't leave any stone unturned: be thorough. Include visuals to explain for the eye to see.

Use my tutorial in this chapter to find your SEO keywords; then, turn those base keywords into *evergreen content posts*.

I've seen big results from my evergreen posts (aka lengthy blog guides): people emailing, commenting, or posting via social platforms to thank me for answering their questions, and readers turning into leads. Evergreen content is something that all content creators should put at the top of their creation list.

On Being Engaging

OK, so I've already talked about how Google appreciates content that's written for a human reader.

You've learned about trust flow and how SEO content has to be good content.

There's another important factor to online writing that ties in: and that is *being engaging*.

Engaging content is a reflection of *how good* your content is, and coincidentally, how well it's received.

Coming up, I'm going to teach you how to research keywords, how to write web pages, and how to utilize SEO skills when you do all these things, but there are two things that trump SEO skills in the end goal:

Being engaging, and being useful.

And the secret of being engaging is being *relatable*. Write to engage the emotions of the reader. Create headlines to turn their heads. *Capture* them. (Remember Chapter I, *Starting Grounds*, and our discussion on storytelling?) This is how you'll keep and retain your readers, once they find your content on Google.

The level of engagement and usefulness in your content directly translates to the level of readership. The more your readers enjoy your piece, and find

it answers their questions, the more big things will happen for your content—people talking about it, sharing it, eating it up like the best new thing on the web.



And this translates to their friends and friends of those friends potentially seeing your content—direct traffic and extra eyes that Google didn't directly bring you. Instead, the quality of your content and its relevancy to your users made that happen. And that's pure magic!

In contrast, if no one finds your content engaging or useful, they likely won't keep reading, or link to your content.

BAM. You're out. No one will convert (visit your site, buy your products).

Here's what I mean...

You could write a decent piece of content (by that I mean your grammar and style is OK), let's say for a dog groomer's blog:

Grooming your Labrador is one of the best ways to keep your dog clean and happy. Keep reading as we share some unique and useful tips on how to groom your beloved dog for best results.

Or...

You could write to be far more *engaging*, like so:

Are you continually frustrated with dog hairs clumping on your carpet?

Does it feel like you have a second pooch around when you empty the vacuum after cleaning your floors?

It's time you learned our tips and tricks for correctly grooming your Labrador.

The inside knowledge we're about to share on best grooming tips, which we've put together after a decade of experience in grooming these beautiful dogs, will significantly lessen the hairy presence of those unwanted tumbleweeds and keep your lovely lab happy, well-groomed, and lighter on his (or her) paws.

Then continue this with real tips that are truly useful, like a unique brand or kind of grooming brush/comb you personally love, a style of grooming you prefer and why, etc. Speak from your “expert” knowledge, write to address the readers’ questions, and provide useful information.

Notice the number of times the word “you” appears in the second example.

Your reader should “be present” in your content. That’s a fundamental trick of writing truly engaging content.

There’s a lot more I could say here on being engaging; but in reality, your best skills in creating truly engaging content come with a lot of consistent practice. Continue to study, practice and hone your skills in this area as you write. Being truly engaging and knowing how to pull in your readers with just the right mix of beautiful, empathetic, resonating words is an *art*. It took me a good four years in online writing to start feeling comfortable about the engagement level of my blog headline writing skills. And creating hundreds to thousands of them during that time. (I’ll share more on how to write the seven different types of online content, including headline tips, tricks and tools ahead—stay tuned!)

The Basics of SEO in Content Writing

Ready? Let's discuss the search engine tactics you should know for online content writing!

Search engine optimization for the content writer isn't difficult to understand. In a nutshell, what you are trying to do is create content that utilizes a particular set of keywords without overdoing the use of those keywords and making your writing sound unnatural. You'll also need to know how to create good optimized headers, subheaders, and meta descriptions. I'm going to show you how to do all of this later!

Choosing your keywords is usually the first step in effective SEO writing, and there are a number of criteria used in keyword selection (more on this later—I'll recommend best tools and give you thorough how-to tips). Once you've chosen your keywords, you have to craft compelling copy that uses these keywords just enough to rank the page well, but not so much that Google thinks you're "stuffing" keywords all over the place, in place of real content.

The SEO Writer and... HTML?

As an online content creator and writer, you're going to have to get your hands dirty and understand a little bit about "Hypertext Markup Language" (HTML). But don't get too worried—you *won't* have to learn how to code like it's your second language (or even close).

Let's talk about the most important HTML bits you should know.

Why We Need to Understand (Parts of) HTML

A serious online content writer will need to know a little about HTML. This is because you'll need to know how to write meta descriptions and tags, and have some knowledge of the HTML code around them.

There's also a slightly less obvious, secondary reason: as writers, we may find ourselves involved in site design (I've had plenty of clients who were

first-time website owners, who asked me to write their home page). So, being able to have an appreciation for how the site is developed enables us to make suggestions that will benefit the user experience of the site itself. It's all part of a bigger picture, and it benefits us to know how that picture is painted, at least at a beginner level.

Disclaimer: *Some content writers are doing very well at writing marketing content, sales pages, and other content types within their “specialty” area, without knowing a single penny’s worth of SEO knowledge. They are doing just fine and making a great income. So, if you have a specialty that doesn’t require SEO knowledge, that’s great—but I’d still recommend starting here if you’re new to this information. Knowing these basics of SEO will absolutely add to your market value as an SEO writer.*

It's not hard to grasp the HTML basics that an online content writer should know. And once you do know them, you'll become a real jack-of-all-trades when it comes to creating copy for businesses.

All you really need to be able to grasp are the *ideas* behind using your content writing skills in SEO, and how to attach the right “tag language” and “SEO words” to your “real language.” It sounds tricky, but trust me, you'll get the hang of it quickly.

Meta Tags

As an online writer, you'll be responsible for creating the HTML-based

meta and header tags for a site owner. If you launch your own website, you'll more than likely end up writing these for yourself, too.

Here are the top tags you should know about:

1. Meta Description

This is a description of the page that search engines “see” as your page summary. The ideal length of this description is 156 characters, including spaces.

I like to call meta descriptions your free PPC (pay-per-click) ad copy.

You're not paying for an ad, but the meta description that appears in Google organically *is* your ad, if your content ranks highly enough. A meta description advertises your content to anyone searching for it in Google.

Here's an example of [expresswriters.com](https://www.expresswriters.com) ranking organically for the keyword “copywriting agency.” I've highlighted the area where our meta description shows up. (We've never paid for a sponsored Google ad.)

Copywriting Agency UK | Copywriters | Online Copywriting

www.benlocker.co.uk/ ▼

Copywriter needed? For online copywriting, bright marketing copywriters and sales letters - choose the **copywriting agency** that gets you business.

Write My Site: Copywriters | Copywriting Agency London

www.writemysite.co.uk/ ▼

Choose our London **copywriting agency** if you need top quality thought leadership content for your brand. Just say no to generic content!

Express Writers: When You Need To Express Your Best

<https://expresswriters.com/> ▼

Awesome **copywriting** for all your content. Blogs, social, content planning, and much more. Express Writers is trusted by thousands of brands. Order Online.

Here's another meta description I wrote for one of our blog guides on how to compound blog posts:

Learn how compounding blog posts can maximize your blog efforts enormously, gaining you more traction month after month. We'll discuss in this blog guide.

Our keyword was “compounding blog posts.” One of our staff members authored the blog, and our goal was that someone searching for this keyword on Google would find our blog as the answer. We wrote it thoroughly enough to address their key questions. So, we included this main keyword in the meta description, at the beginning, which is preferable. I had just a few characters left, which was good: always aim for as close to 0 as you can. You want to try to fill all those 156 characters.

Notice how naturally the keyword fits into the sentence I wrote for my meta description. You can also include any synonyms for your main keyword. That’s why many site owners commission writers to create meta descriptions—these little tidbits of content need to be very well-written. Remember, this is the meta snippet that shows up in Google, basically “*advertising*” your post to the public.

2. Title Tag

These are some of the most important meta tags. Search engines see this text as the title of the entire page. This is what appears in the title bar of your browser when you’re on a particular page. These are also visible to the user – they are the text you see in the title bar of your browser window, or tab, identifying the page you’re currently on.

Here’s an example of our home page title tag, *When You Need to Express Your Best – Express Writers*, that shows up when I open expresswriters.com in a new Google Chrome browser:

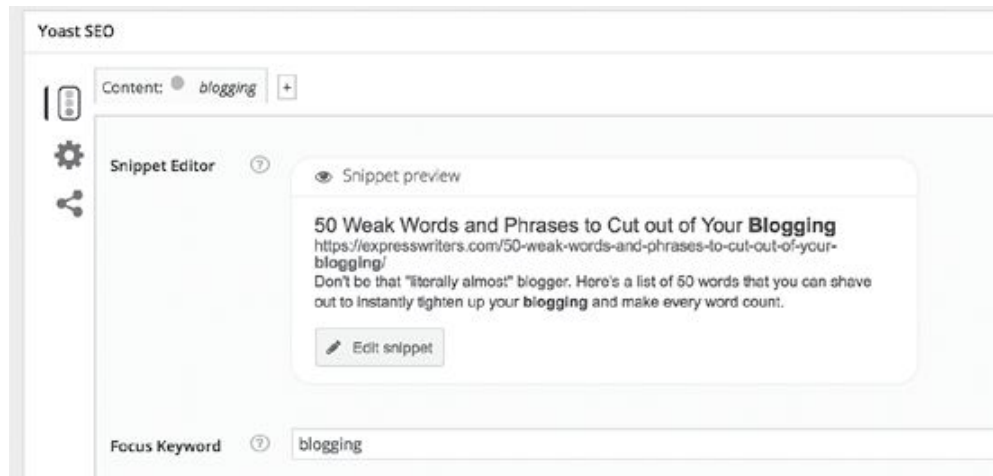


As another example, I have a blog called “50 Weak Words and Phrases to Cut Out of Your Blogging,” and this is the exact wording in the title tag you’ll see at the top of your browser if you click on the blog post.

In the backend of WordPress, I type this in my title section: “*50 Weak Words and Phrases to Cut out of Your Blogging.*” You can add the company

name, if it fits (if you're using Yoast, it will tell you if anything is too long). The main keyword you're trying to use (here, I was using *blogging*) should absolutely be in the title tag, but used naturally, not forced.

I use the free Yoast⁴ SEO plugin to plug in all my metadata. Here's a screenshot of what the backend of my WordPress blog post looks like (I've scrolled down to the Yoast SEO plugin, right below the physical post):



3. Header Tags

These tags are, specifically, the “header” tags that go around a “subheader.”

Your subheaders are the bolded headers throughout your blog or article that help break up your content—they're absolutely necessary to use when writing long-form blogs and web pages.

Here's an example of a subheader using the keyword “poodle grooming:”

<h2>5 of the Best Professional Tools for Poodle Grooming</h2>

The header tag itself is what you put around that subheader if you're in the backend of a WordPress post you're about to publish: `<h>` and `</h>`. These are the bits of HTML that tell Google, your reader, and the entire web that this is your header.

Below is my opening paragraph, then my subheader, with the header tag HTML around the headers. If I were posting this in a blog, I would want my first subheader, and any following, to go inside the header tags. **<h2>** or

`</h2>` would be the correct tag if this is my first subheader. You can vary this to h3 for subheaders below your h2s.

Example excerpt of my article's opening paragraph with the first subheader:

Are you frustrated with your current poodle grooming tactics? We know brushing that frisky poodle can be a challenge. Sit tight—we're going to teach you how you can groom the locks of your super-active pooch to perfection, no matter how crazy and active that puppy is!

First, let's discuss the best tools you should be using for grooming your poodle.

`<h2>5 of the Best Professional Tools for Poodle Grooming</h2>`

For future subheadings, use `<h2>` for your main headers, and `<h3>` for any sub-point. It's always good to have an h3 if you have h2s. You can use both h2 tags and h3 tags more than once.

An example of an h3 for our same content piece:

`<h3>1. Curved Slicker Brush</h3>`

I'm using this h3 for a sub-point below my first header, *5 of the Best Professional Tools for Poodle Grooming*.

I've mentioned h2 and h3, but for the curious mind, what about h1? Well, the h1 tag isn't usually used in our content posts, outside of actual web code. H1s are the only tags that must never be used more than once on a page. Typically, you'll never need to place those in your content.

Remember that none of the heading tags apply if you're delivering your content to a client in a Word doc. You wouldn't put in these `<>` heading tags unless you're making a live post and you need the headers to show up on the live published blog.

4. Meta Keywords

These help to place the page's relevance to search results. This attribute tag is all about the keywords that we talked about earlier. Interestingly enough,

this mattered more years ago, before Google devalued this metric when too many people started stuffing keywords in this tag. So, you won't need to know this one, or use it. It's more or less obsolete by now.

SEO Writing + (Keyword Research)

Earlier, we mentioned the term 'keywords' and how they can affect search results. But, how do we come up with those keywords? What factors should we be looking for when choosing them?

Keyword research usually involves a bit of thought, and a lot of investigation, to figure out which keywords are best suited to each piece of web copy or an entire site. If you want to dig in and understand this, you'll come out with something I like to call "SEO Writing Plus"—you'll have the "*plus*" of knowing how to research, and use, great keywords in your online content.

It's kind of like the + in an A+ grade. This is a skill that many clients will greatly appreciate, and are willing to pay for. Or, if you're building your own website, this knowledge will come in handy far more than once for you.

Keyword research is one of the most crucial fundamental and beginning strategies in creating online content that will be eligible for great rankings.

Why are keywords so important? When it comes down to it, keywords are what direct your people to your page. Well-crafted content with accurate, matching, relevant keywords ensures that the search engine knows exactly where it is directing users, and what content they will find there. This way, you are able to attract relevant visitors: and relevant visitors are more likely to convert and buy based on relevant content.

When choosing keywords for your online content, it's not just about getting as many people to see your content as possible. It's about getting the right people.

The right keywords, used in relevant, engaging content, ensure that the

right audience sees your site—and that makes all the difference to a site’s conversion numbers at the end of the month.

Determining the Value of a Keyword

Keywords must reference your site and what you do. In other words, they must be related—meaning, you can’t have a footwear website and stuff in keywords like “teddy bears.” (Not even if you’re trying to anticipate a kid accidentally searching for that keyword when he really wants a pair of shoes. Clever, maybe, but you should stay focused on your site’s specific topic or offering.)

To this end, keywords you choose to include in your web content should be based on the type of business or product the site offers.

So, thorough keyword research begins with these two steps:

1. Relevance

When you think about a keyword for your site, ask yourself if the keyword is relevant to the site. Is the target audience, someone who would want to buy or subscribe via your site, liable to engage using these keywords? You’re building a site that can be targeted by users via a search. Related keywords raise the possibility of getting the *right* eyes on your content.

Start with a general list of keywords that feel related to the site you’re writing for. Most of the time, this is a list you’d get from your client. You’ll then research these keywords.

Best way to get “keyword skeleton ideas:”

- Ask your client, or yourself, “What words would a typical client or customer type in Google in order to search for exactly what I’m selling/offering?”

2. Perform Basic Keyword Research

Now that you have your keyword skeleton list, use the following tools to research your list and find “best fits.” I recommend the following tools (the sites for these are listed in my Appendix section), but my word of advice here is to try to narrow down your go-to list to just one or two tools that you like the best, after you try these for yourself. That way you don’t get inundated with a long list of tools, which could easily discourage you from actually using them.

I’ll break down my recommended tools into two categories. The first gives you the tools that have the most features; last are the very easy, simple-to-use, one-click keyword research tools. *(Note: this doesn’t mean the second list is less powerful than the first, by any means: these tools just have less features than the comprehensive list.)*

Comprehensive SEO tools:

- SEMrush’s Keyword Analytics
- Wordtracker
- AuthorityMetrics

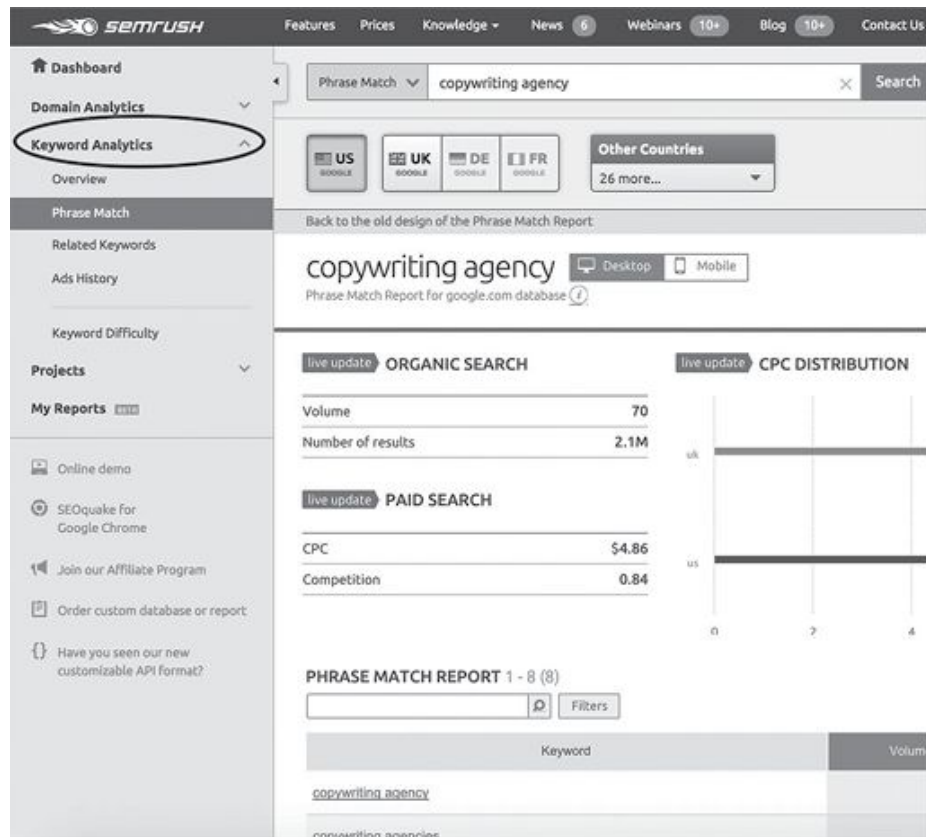
Quick, easy keyword-research-only tools:

- KeywordTool.io
- KWFinder.com
- Übersuggest

All of these tools offer some free trial variation (free keyword searches, a free limited time amount), but in the end you'll need to fork up a monthly fee to get the most out of them. If you just have one or two clients or only a handful of keywords, you can scrape by on their free trial at first. But, if you have a lot of web content clients or searches to do, your keyword analyses will be much stronger if you invest in a few. (For my site, I use SEMrush constantly; Wordtracker and KWFinder a little less often.)

Keep in mind that most keyword analysis software programs have their own “identification” for a good keyword: a keyword score that rates a keyword 0-100 (highest being best). In SEMrush, this is the “KD,” or Keyword Difficulty index. In Wordtracker, this is “KEI,” or Keyword Effectiveness Index; and “Diff” (Difficulty) in KWFinder. Just sort these scores by highest to see the top recommended keywords right away. However, when I've done this, I've noticed that I still have to use the powers of my “human brain” to sort for the best, most relatable matches: some of their top recommendations have been completely unrelated (like *alarm clock* when I was looking up *green socks*—huh?). That's why I recommend more than one tool, too, when researching keywords.

SEMrush is easy to use, yet very in-depth and comprehensive. To access their keyword tool, login or sign up and go to the Keyword Analytics tab from the dashboard. Type your keyword in the search bar (or, you can also type in a main competitor's site to see what they rank for):



We'll talk about what to do with the SEMrush findings in a bit.

Wordtracker allows you to choose where to source your keyword data from (their database, Google, YouTube, etc.) which is helpful if you want to go after, say, keywords for a YouTube video. You can also narrow down your search locations to a specific country. Wordtracker also has another metric called "IAAT," or In Anchor and Title—it's the raw competition figure defining how many pages use that keyword in their anchor text and title tag. (See, you're already putting your meta tag knowledge to use here!) You can build projects and lists in the tool as well. Here's what a general search on "online marketing" pulled up, in Wordtracker:

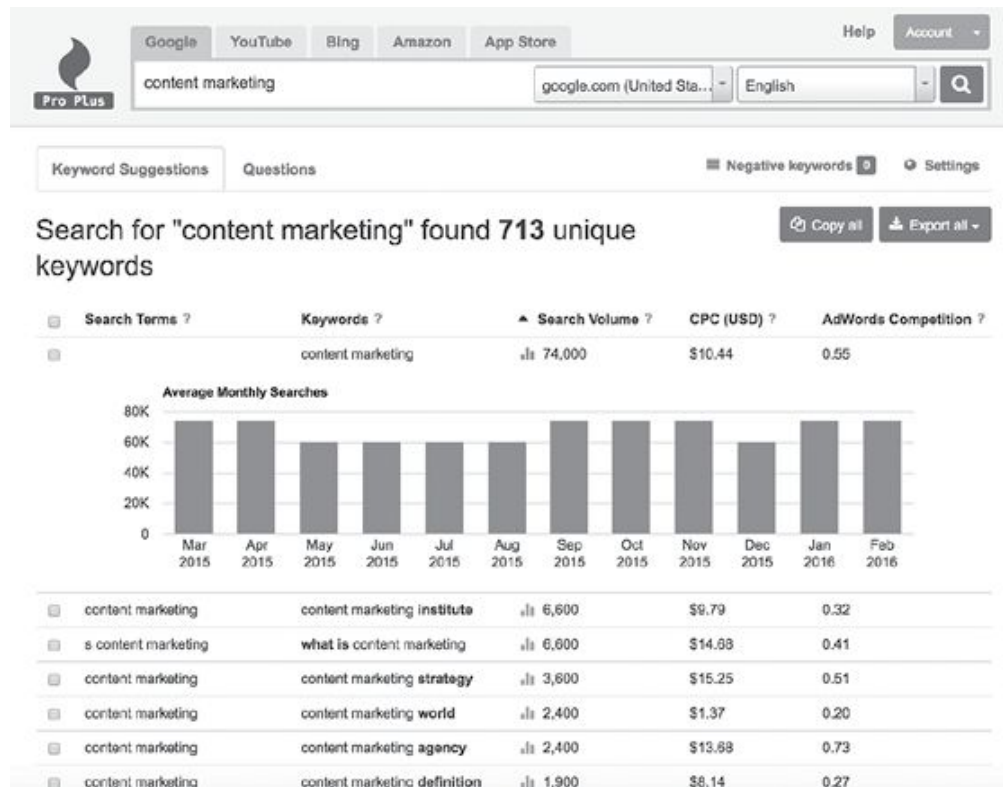
The screenshot shows the Wordtracker website interface. At the top, there's a navigation bar with 'Wordtracker' logo and links for 'FIND KEYWORDS', 'PROJECTS', 'LISTS', 'MY ACCOUNT', and 'HELP'. Below this, there are two main search panels. The left panel is titled 'Find keywords related to...' and has a text input '...the following keyword:' with a 'SEARCH' button. The right panel is titled 'Find keywords that include...' and has a text input '...the following keywords, one per line:' with 'online marketing' entered. To the right of this input are settings for 'Source' (Wordtracker), 'Country' (Global), and 'Month' (March 2016), along with a 'SEARCH' button. Below the settings are radio buttons for 'Keywords in any order' (selected), 'Keywords inside a search term', and 'Exact keyword only', and checkboxes for 'Adult Keywords' and 'Plurals' (checked). Below the search panels, it says '5,000 keywords' and has buttons for 'EXPORT', 'SAVE...', 'REMOVE', and 'Hide filters'. There's an 'Add filter' button. Below that is a table with columns: KEYWORD, VOLUME, COMP, IAAT, and KEI. The table has two rows of results.

	KEYWORD	VOLUME	COMP	IAAT	KEI
1	online marketing	4,169	27.6	39,915	59.5
2	marketing online	3,169	18.36	6,113	66.1

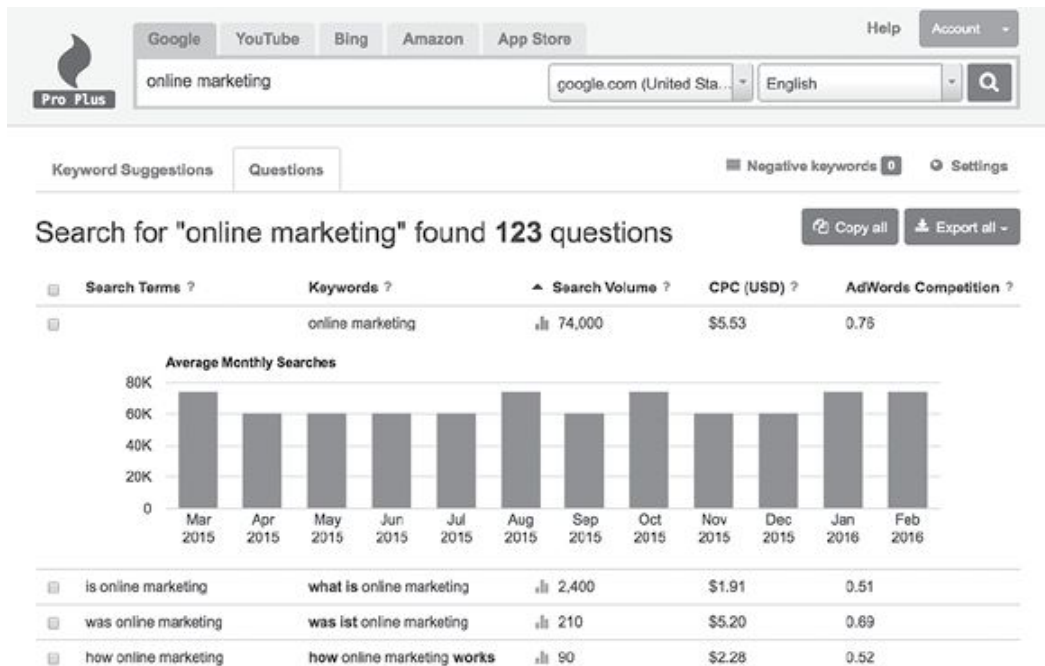
AuthorityMetrics is more complicated to use with a variety of keyword filters, but it offers in-depth results. It can scrutinize what your competitors are doing keyword-wise. This tool requires a monthly paid subscription based on how many keywords you want it to yield (not per search, but for each keyword in the results), starting at 8,000 keywords per month; so just be careful about running your best possible searches so you don't max out the month's allotment, or things could get pricey. The Competitor Keyword Suggestions is their key feature; it gives you instant opportunities for low-competition, high-value SEO keywords based on your competitors. The search is as easy as typing in the domain of your competitor, which brings up keyword results based on Difficulty, (this measures in numbers the average strength of competitors in organic search results), RankValue (an estimated value of ranking in the top organic search results, a monetary amount), and Opportunity (a score based on RankValue and Keyword Difficulty).

KeywordTool.io is very simple to use. Just plug a keyword in their search bar, and you're off to the races. They only show you a few keyword factors

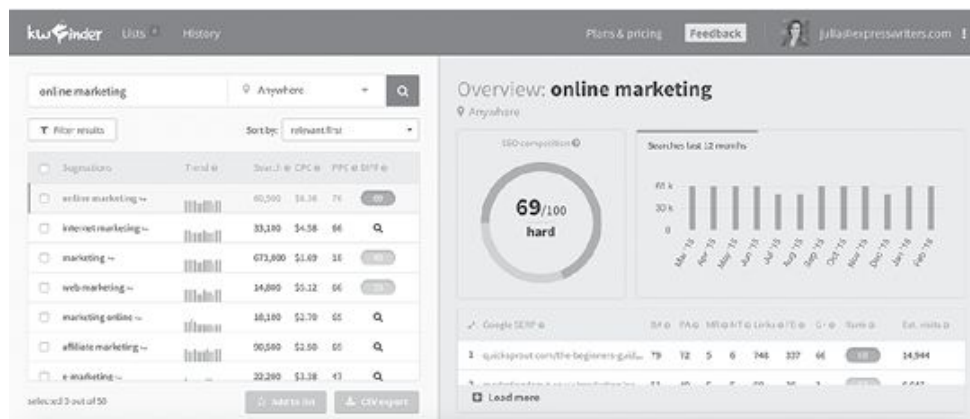
(search volume, CPC, and AdWords competition), but the result is a clean, simple search result.



What's also neat about this tool is the Questions tab. You can find "questions" around your keyword that are being searched online with one click:

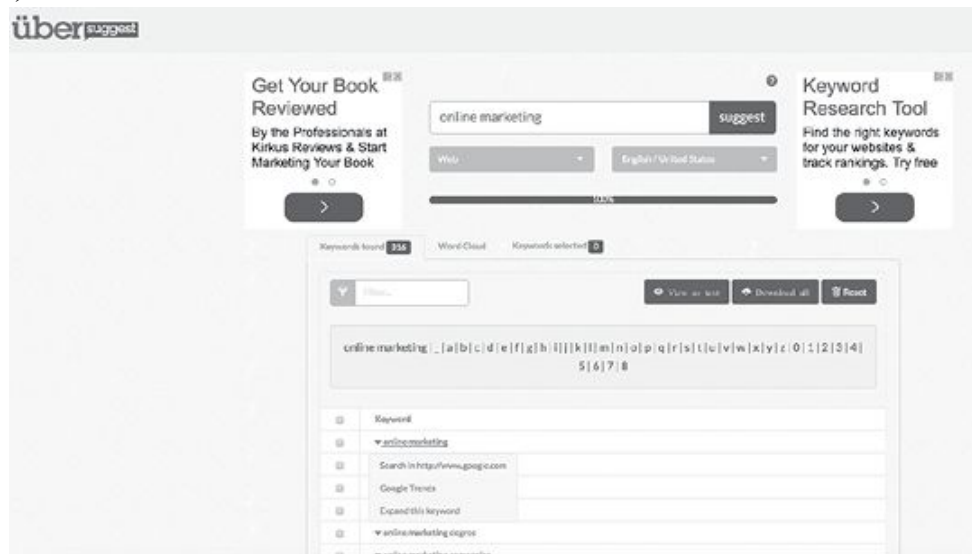


This is a great way to come up with topics and titles for your SEO content. KWFinder.com is one of the most powerful, but simple, tools I've discovered to specifically go after in-depth, long-tail keywords that I can't find much data on elsewhere. It's a fairly new tool; the founders initially launched it on Reddit in 2015, where it earned great feedback. Reddit users loved its ease of use and the powerful results it gave. To use it, just type in your keyword to find immediate details: a score wheel populates on the right hand side with viable keyword grades (1-100, easy-hard level), and the tool even shows you what's currently ranking in Google for that keyword, its search trend over the last 12 months, and more.



Übersuggest is a dirt-simple keyword research tool that basically gives

you long-tail keyword ideas from Google for your seed keywords. It's a great starting point if you need long-tail keywords and can't seem to come up with any. If you type in "online marketing," for example, this comes up in Übersuggest (click the arrows on the keywords to get to the popup window):



Also, a side note here: I didn't mention Google Trends/Google AdWords Keyword Planner on purpose. Not to put down Google by any means, but I really don't use their tools for keyword research; they aren't as thorough or as user-friendly as the other SEO tools I've listed above. You have to have an AdWords account to use them, and the results are oriented to using your keywords in paid campaigns. You'll find a lack of thorough data in Google's keyword tools, as opposed to what you'll discover using other SEO keyword tools. Other SEO gurus have noted this as well, not just me.⁵

Last side note: I'm not paid in any way by or affiliated with any of the tools I mention. I'm just talking about what works for me, and what I've found to be the simplest and best tools to use for the SEO side of online writing.

Keyword research tools also give you suggestions on related keywords so you can expand the number of relevant, viable keywords you use on your site. From the keywords you originally received from a client, or brainstormed for, you can narrow the list down to the "best" ones and

include more words from the additional recommended keywords. KWFinder, Übersuggest, and KeywordTool.io are all great tools for helping you find more long-tail keywords.

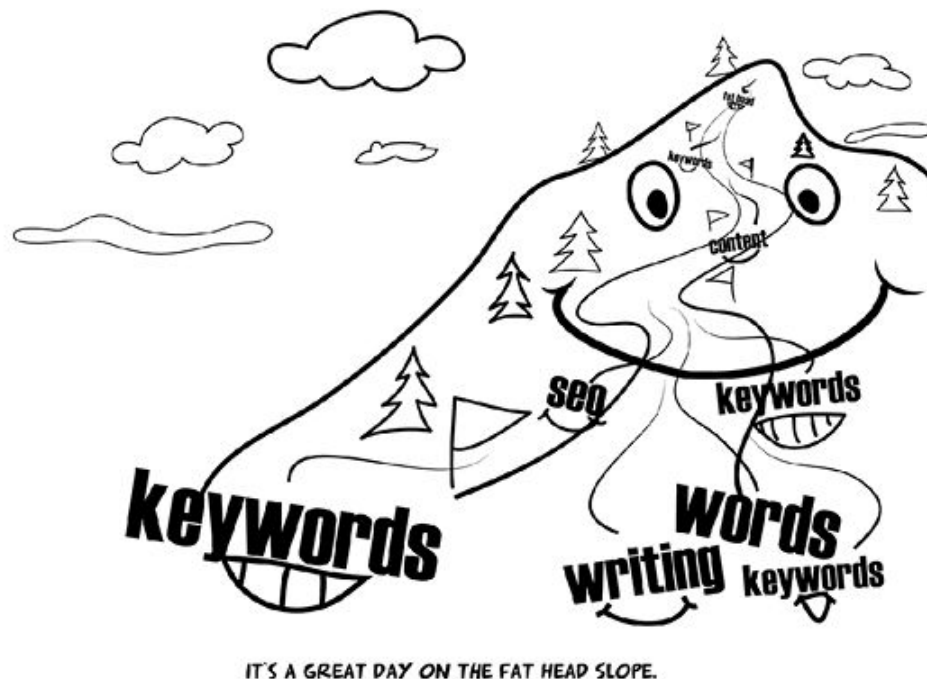
Pick Your Fights: Long Tail Versus Fat Head (or Head Tail)

Worth a brief explanation here is the term fat head vs. long tail (yes, we're still talking about keywords).

The top 100 or even 500 keywords with *the most searches* are known as the “fat head,” or head tail, of the curve.

Each one may have thousands or even hundreds of thousands of monthly searches, although overall, they typically only account for up to 20 or 30% of total searches.

The remaining searches fall under a “long-tail” of hundreds of terms that may get very few searches per month, but make up 70% of total searches.



Fat head terms are general, broad, and popular; your long tails are the ones we've described above (*juice bar* is a fat head term, *juice bar in Austin, TX* is long tail). I've already explained how going specific is often the best choice; you're homing in on your best exact-match user.

3. Determine the Best Keywords

By looking at your collected results and related keyword data for a set of keywords, you can determine those that will give you the best edge on the competition, and those that won't.

Commercial intent is one way to narrow down excellent long-tail keywords that will include common buying phrases. There are generally four keyword classes in the *commercial intent* category:

- **Buy Now keywords**, that include “buy,” “shipping,” “discount,” “deal,” etc.
- **Product keywords**, like “cheap laptop,” “review of X brand/product/company,” “comparison,” “affordable”
- **Informational keywords**, like “how to,” “I need to”
- **Low-conversion keywords**, like searches with “free,” “download” included

Commercial intent also ties into CPC because the CPC, or cost-per-click (which Google has now replaced with the term *Suggested Bid*), is a *really* good way to define how valuable a commercial intent keyword is. (For more about commercial intent, see Brian Dean's guide on Backlinko.⁶)

And *competition* ties into commercial intent because the more people bid on a keyword (CPC/Suggested Bid), aka *pay* for that keyword to show up in Google's Sponsored section, the more lucrative and moneymaking that keyword is (which is called the competition of that keyword).

Remember that high-competition keywords have a lot of competition going for them, which means they won't be easy to rank for, if you aren't a big company with lots of existing content already online. High-competition keywords will have high CPC (cost per click), which is the amount of money people pay per click to get their ad listed in Google's “Sponsored” results for those keywords. So, high-competition keywords will require a lot more of an investment, both time and money, to rank well for. Seek out

low-competition keywords, which will be far easier to start ranking for fairly soon if you write and publish good SEO content around them.

So, look for low-competition keywords, and in tandem, balance that value with the amount of monthly searches on average.

Question. When it comes to sorting by the monthly search volume for a keyword, more is always better, right?

Not so simple. A low monthly search doesn't mean you should rule a keyword out.

The key to monthly searches revolves around who your client is, and what service they provide. For example, if you have a law firm or a juice bar exclusive to a location, and “Austin family law attorney” or “organic juice bar in Austin” has 100 monthly searches or less, that *is* still a viable keyword.

Why?

Every one of those 100 people walking into that business is *highly* qualified to be **a lead you can close**.

I'd recommend long-tail keywords as a priority keyword focus to optimize and target your content to your best, closest-fit online audience. If you absolutely have to use a broad keyword, though, start by looking at the keywords that have the lowest competition.

4. Select the Winners

Winnowing out the keywords that you *can't* use allows you to start working to develop content around the keywords that you *can* use. Download your findings by selecting the keywords and exporting them as a PDF or to an Excel spreadsheet. You can then show your client this list, and/or refer to it when you write your content.

Know who your target client is—ask yourself, who would walk in the door and buy? Look for “long-tail” keywords that are the most relevant, and don’t worry if the search volume is low. You’ll be able to narrow your list down to some great keywords, and get started using them in your SEO content.

For more in-depth guides on SEO keywords, I’d highly recommend Brian Dean’s written resources at Backlinko. They go a lot further on this topic. Wordtracker’s guides on the structure of good keywords, in the Wordtracker Academy section, are also good if you really want to get familiar with keywords. Quick Sprout’s Advanced Guide to SEO, although hefty, can be a great reference too. Feel free to geek out: I’ll list these resources in my Appendix.

Live Keyword Reports in Action

I’m going to give you several examples of keyword reports. Let’s start with a general client in the pet service category. To not overwhelm you, I’m going to stick to two of my favorite tools: SEMrush, and Wordtracker.

Case 1: Bob’s Poodle Grooming Service

Bob hired me to create content for his new poodle grooming site, built in WordPress, and he wants some ongoing blogs and new website pages. I went to SEMrush and typed in *poodle grooming* to start the search, and saw this:

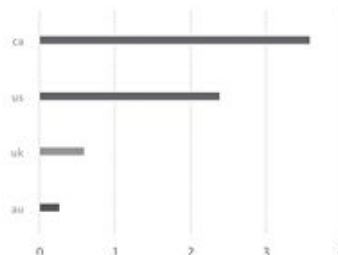
live update ORGANIC SEARCH

Volume 880
Number of results 990K

live update PAID SEARCH

CPC \$2.39
Competition 0.40

live update CPC DISTRIBUTION



TREND



PHRASE MATCH REPORT 1 - 70 (70)

Filters

Keyword	Volume	KD	CPC (USD)	Com.
how to groom a poodle	720	76.63	1.60	0.27
poodle grooming styles	320	71.61	1.69	0.39
pink poodle grooming	210	71.85	3.10	0.41
standard poodle grooming	140	73.57	2.14	0.53

How to groom a poodle is the first result in SEMrush, with a search volume of 720 and a competition **below** .3. That's a darn good keyword opportunity!

To be sure I was on the right track and reinforce which are the best keywords for Bob, I typed the same thing in Wordtracker, and found these results:

4 keywords EXPORT SAVE... REMOVE Hide filters

Add filter

	KEYWORD	VOLUME	COMP	IAAT	KEI
1	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> poodle puppy grooming	60	3.51	3	79.48
2	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> poodle grooming roman style	6	-	-	-
3	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> poodle grooming	5	7.61	106	56.18
4	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> standard poodle grooming cuts	3	0	0	100

There's one keyword there, *poodle puppy grooming*, that wouldn't be too bad – 60 searches and a KEI rating of almost 80%. But, the comp at 3.51 is higher than anything I see on SEMrush with keyword opportunities, so I'm going to leave it out. With a higher competition (greater than 1, which all

the SEMrush top findings are mostly below), Bob wouldn't have a good chance at ranking for that keyword without a big established site, quite a bit of thorough content, or paying for Google AdWords sponsored spots.

In both software programs, I've sorted by "volume" (the amount of searches) and kept my eye on "competition" for lowest numbers there, and then I copied and pasted the best keywords into a new Excel spreadsheet.

These are the keywords that offer very realistic opportunities where Bob could easily start ranking on Google with his blogs and content, if he creates one page or post minimum per keyword, of at least a thousand words in length. I'd even go so far as to recommend thorough guides in the form of several 2,000+ word topical blog posts *per* keyword.

By *topical* blog posts, I just mean to create multiple solid topics for blogs around the actual keywords, using the keywords naturally in the topic. For best results, I'd suggest several of these guides per keyword—never try to create one article on all keywords if you really want to see best results in the rankings.

	A	B	C	D	E	F	
1	Keyword	Search Volume	Keyword Difficulty Index	CPC	Competition	Number of Results	
2	how to groom a poodle	720	76.63	1.6	0.27	945000	
3	poodle grooming styles	320	71.61	1.69	0.39	316000	
4	poodle grooming	880	77.25	2.39	0.4	990000	
5	pink poodle grooming	210	71.85	3.1	0.41	226000	
6	standard poodle grooming	140	73.57	2.14	0.53	500000	
7	grooming poodles	140	76.4	2.38	0.46	484000	
8	poodle grooming cuts	140	78.44	0.1	0.42	258000	
9	grooming a poodle	140	77.02	4.9	0.4	970000	
10	how to groom a toy poodle	110	76.23	0	0.35	230000	
11	toy poodle grooming	110	79.77	0.13	0.37	606000	
12							
13							

A few topics to get started on to create SEO-optimized, in-depth blog posts could include:

- *10 Rules from Your Groomer on How to Groom a Poodle*
- *Your Essential Guide on How to Groom a Poodle*
- *How to Groom a Poodle: 5 Tools You Need Now & Other Tips*

Note that we've just touched on the first keyword with these topics.

There's a *lot* we can create here.

So, Bob has really terrific opportunities. The competition is below .5 except for one keyword. That's not bad if you contrast it with a keyword like "online marketing," which has .95 com (competition) and a CPC of \$18.26.

To finish the report for Bob, I'd include the full SEMrush report (export as Excel, copy/paste) in a second tab, just so he can see all the keyword opportunities that exist.

Case 2: John's Denver, Colorado Family Law Practice

Another client on our list is a Denver, Colorado family lawyer named John. (I've picked this example because the more geo-local and specific you get, the harder keyword discovery becomes.)

To start, I typed *Denver family lawyer* in SEMrush, which is John's closest match keyword. I saw some high CPC and low-volume searches (very common in the attorney/legal category for Google AdWords):

denver family lawyer

Desktop Mobile

Phrase Match Report for google.com database

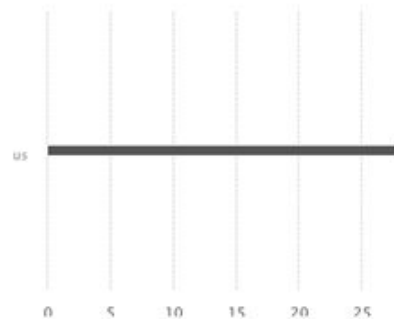
live update ORGANIC SEARCH

Volume	50
Number of results	1.4M

live update PAID SEARCH

CPC	\$28.21
Competition	0.81

live update CPC DISTRIBUTION



PHRASE MATCH REPORT 1 - 8 (8)

Filters

Keyword	Volume
family lawyer denver	70
denver family lawyer	50
family law lawyer denver co	40
denver family law lawyer	30
family lawyers denver	30

These keywords are all under 70 searches a month, but the one with 30 searches is going for \$53.20 per click. The competition for all of these is pretty high, right off the bat—around .81 and .98. Still, I see a few opportunities that show less competition. So, we'll check them out in the final report.

Conducting the same search for John's keywords in Wordtracker produced this result:

4 keywords		EXPORT ▾	SAVE...	REMOVE	Hide filters
Add filter					
	KEYWORD	VOLUME	COMP	IAAT	KEI
1	best lawyer in denver for family law ▾	9	3.21	2	74.41
2	family law lawyers denver best restaurants ▾	2	0	0	100
3	sale homes in denver family divorce lawyer ▾	1	0	0	100
4	family lawyer denver co ▾	1	0	0	100

There's only one viable keyword in Wordtracker, and the volume there is only nine searches a month.

Now wait a second. Isn't that too low? The more people you can get, the better, right?

You should never, ever rule out a keyword just because it has "too few monthly searches." That's one of the biggest keyword myths. Yes, it is great to get a lot of people in your door, so *do* look for high search volume; but *don't* let this rule out other important factors. Don't think of search volume numbers as an absolute golden rule, because long-tail searches can bring in a lot of traffic—more than what an SEO tool might be able to reveal.

Think of it this way.

What if you hone down to the exact keyword *YOUR* perfect client would search for, and even if that's 25 searches a month but results in 5-10 direct monthly conversions, isn't that much better than if hundreds of people come in with just one or two conversions, because they are totally uninterested in your actual advertised product or service?

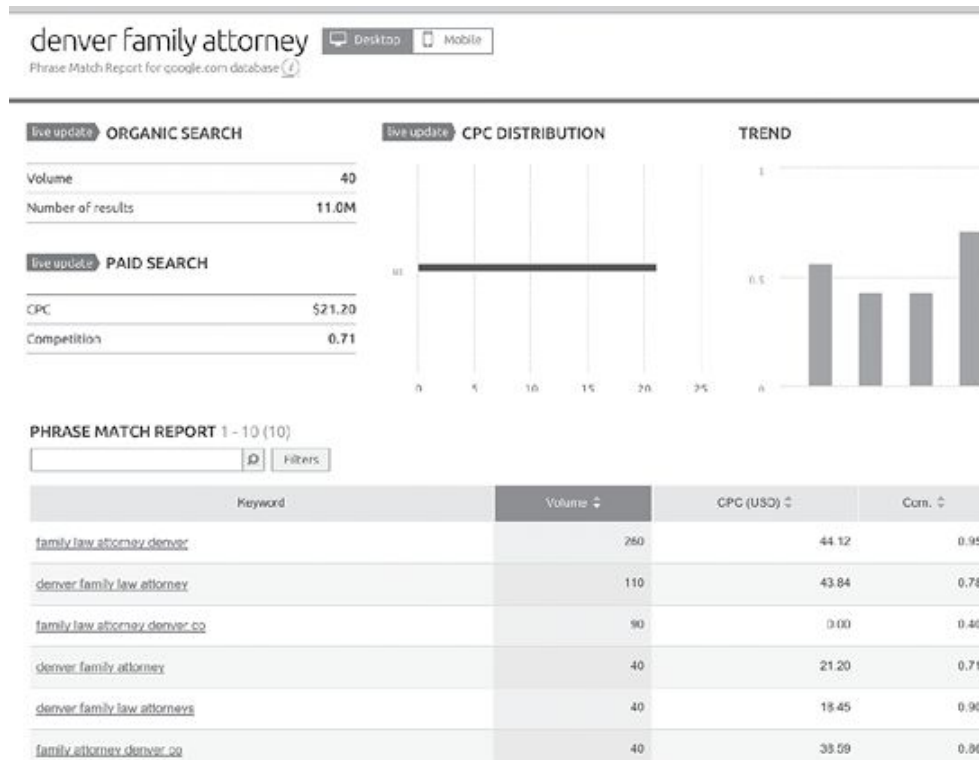
In our client's legal industry, nine searches a month is still not even too low—what if five out of those nine searches a month became five new legal court cases?

Remember, this is a *location-specific* keyword, so prospective searchers are right in the lawyer's geographic area. And what if one of those clients was worth a million dollars to the lawyer, in a winning case? You get my

drift... This is the reason legal keywords go for a ton of money per click in Google AdWords.

One more note on this client. We're nowhere near done with the "seed" keyword, *Denver family lawyer*. You should also be looking up *synonyms* for this client's advertised service.

Here's the power of looking up a service-related synonym:



Our findings just jumped to include a keyword with 260 monthly searches! True, the competition is through the roof at .95, but this brings up a new list with more monthly searches, which is great.

The same synonym search produces additional findings in Wordtracker, too:

5 keywords EXPORT SAVE... REMOVE Hide filters					
+ Add filter					
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	KEYWORD	VOLUME	COMP	IAAT	KEI
1	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> denver family law attorney	37	4.34	8	74.51
2	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> denver family law attorneys	4	3.21	2	71.41
3	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> direct tv denver co family divorce attorney	2	0	0	100
4	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> family attorney denver co	1	0	0	100
5	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> family law attorney denver	1	3.21	2	65.96

Keep in mind, as I mentioned earlier, that sometimes the volume of a keyword could be slightly incorrect—from the screenshot above, see how *family law attorney Denver* shows “1” in the volume search? I bet there are a few more searches for that keyword going on per month than that. As Google and SEO/digital software grows smarter and indexes more keywords, this information will become more accurate. So for now, the volume data isn’t always the most accurate algorithm robot on the earth (at least, not yet).

Now that we’ve completed searching a couple of synonyms on our client’s keywords, here is a decent final opportunity list.

	A	B	C	D	E
1	Keyword	Search Volume	CPC	Competition	Number of Results
2	family law lawyer denver co	40	0	0.27	2100000
3	denver co family lawyer	10	0	0.52	25500000
4	family lawyer denver co	20	0	0.64	27800000
5	family law attorney denver co	90	0	0.4	7530000
6	denver family attorney	40	21.2	0.71	11000000
7	denver family lawyers	20	36.5	0.71	2420000
8	denver co family attorney	20	0	0.76	2070000
9	denver family law attorney	110	43.84	0.78	2060000
10	family law firm denver	2	0	0	
11	family attorney denver co	1			
12					
13					

John should start publishing content written around the lowest com (competition) keywords.

I'd even include these in a second tab inside the Excel spreadsheet to show the client what he's up against, in terms of direct-match keywords:

5	denver family lawyer	50	28.21	0.81	1420000
6	denver family law lawyer	30	0	0.9	1780000
7	family lawyers denver	30	53.2	0.94	32900000
8	family law attorney denver	260	44.12	0.95	13000000
9	family lawyer denver	70	55.71	0.98	23400000
0	denver family law attorneys	40	18.45	0.9	1550000
1	family attorney denver co	40	38.59	0.86	6640000
2	best family law attorney in de	30	42.33	0.9	1430000
3	family attorney denver	20	50.36	0.97	21400000
4	family law attorneys denver	20	42.09	1	13100000
5					

Final notes here:

#1: Your choice of keyword tool will affect what you find, the data, and the results you get.

As I mentioned, SEMrush and Wordtracker are two keyword research tools that I constantly use, so I've stuck to just using them in my case studies for simplicity's sake. I would recommend you try out the other tools I've listed, though, especially KWFinder.com and KeywordTool.io when you look for your long-tail keywords.

#2. There are also going to be some inevitable cases where you don't find ANY relevant keyword data. However, I think this will change as time and technology advances. For example: with the launch of tools like KWFinder.com, and even as SEMrush has grown in their own database and development, I've seen far more stats today on keyword data than what I saw just five years ago. So, today's lack of keyword data might not be true for tomorrow.

That said, when there are keywords you research that present no findings (which still happens for me sometimes).

When this occurs:

- Do not panic.
- You can just use the main services/product as the focus keyword,

and you can go broader in searches (omitting the location, if it's location-based; searching for good, general service keywords; then simply adding in the location or additional long-tail, synonymous keywords here and there, naturally, as you write the site content).

Developing an SEO Keyword Strategy

So after you've assembled your keywords, where do you go from here?

Should you just start writing content that uses your keywords? Can you include all of them in your meta tags to get noticed by Google? Should you fit them in everywhere they can go?

The short answer to all of these questions is that your keywords aren't the end of your job—quite the opposite.

Keywords are the *start* of your online content marketing efforts.

Finding the right ones is the foundation of your entire SEO keyword strategy.

An SEO keyword strategy requires you to utilize these keywords in the right way when developing content for a site. What this means is that you need to spread your keywords throughout your content, but not in a way that makes it awkward or unnatural for readers.

Remember that Google reads web content humanly nowadays? You're trying to make it readable so both humans and the search engine algorithm can get the gist of what you're saying. Then, humans will stay on your content for the sake of its usefulness, and the search engine will index your content in higher rankings to drive more relevant visitors to your site. Win-win.

Using Keywords

It's worth a mention before we close this chapter, but I'm not going to spend much time here: *keyword density*.

This is an outdated practice that was active years ago, when I was an online content writer, back in 2011. Many of the marketers buying content from me back then, at far too cheap rates, asked me to count the keyword density in their SEO articles. And they wanted a *lot* of keywords stuffed in there.

The rule of thumb today is no more than 3% keyword density. But, don't ever "count" your keywords (and that's what keyword density is: it's taking the number of keywords you used in your content, dividing that by the total number of words, then multiplying x 100 to determine the final percentage).

Counting keywords is simply not something to do anymore, because thinking about your *readers*, and the usefulness of your content, and all that good stuff, is *far* more important than counting how many times a bunch of words appear throughout your page.

Keyword placement is more important, so I'll discuss a few brief rules on that:

1. **Use the keyword in the headline and the meta tag, once.** Use the keyword in the headline or title, naturally, and in the meta tags; specifically, title and meta description, one mention in each place. The keyword should be worked in your writing naturally, which will happen anyway if the keyword is correctly related to your content. Example: if your keyword is orange juice, and your topic is *15 Ways Drinking Orange Juice Every Morning Can Improve Your Health*, then your keyword falls naturally in there.
2. **Body content.** In a blog, article, web page, or any form of online SEO copy, you should use all your keywords naturally. The most important thing I recommend is using the keyword in your first paragraph, and in your <h2> header tags, or, where your first bolded subheader is; but not more than once per place. And, don't ever "stuff" your keywords in.

Content first, keywords second. Google will penalize you for too many keywords. Choose where you place them, don't worry about counting them.

Think of your readers, how to make your content useful and engaging, and the amount of research you need to do. Research like you're a private eye. Bring in factual statistics and original sources whenever you cite facts. Write to be engaging. Talk to your audience as if they're standing in front of you. *Then* think about your keywords and make sure they're being used naturally throughout.

And remember, meta tags should include at least one of your chosen keywords (it's best to create at least one new piece of content for every keyword on your list). Pay attention to your keywords and place them naturally in the meta description, title tag, and subheaders.

SEO & the Content Writer

Now you have a better appreciation for how online writers are involved in SEO, and why we are essential to the success of an overall online SEO and marketing strategy.

One last tip: stay on top of your SEO writing knowledge. I've included a list of sites I recommend following in the Appendix. My rule of thumb is to browse and read through a dozen new blogs or articles a week. Sometimes I'll go through even more than that. Go out there and find what you enjoy reading—make sure the marketers have a solid reputation and are well-known influencers online—and keep up your knowledge. At the very least, sign up for the newsletters of the sites I've recommended. Whatever pops into your inbox, regarding Google's latest algorithm, read it! You'll stay up-to-date and knowledgeable as an online writer.

Writers who understand SEO and how it plays into online content are in high demand for online writing jobs. SEO training makes you more

marketable than the non-SEO trained content writer, and it gives you the edge in a competitive industry. It's added value.

And what's more, SEO basics that you'll use as a writer are simple to learn and to implement: the more you use them, the more skilled you'll become.

Chapter Close: 5 Key Takeaways

Let's wrap up this (rather massive) chapter with some key points outlining the role that SEO plays in online content writing, and your top takeaway skills.

1. Know which types of online content involve SEO skills.

Involve SEO in these types of writing:

- Web content
- Blogging
- Journalism (online press releases)
- Industry writing, creative writing, sales copy (sometimes)

Rule of thumb when creating SEO content: focus on the *quality* of your content rather than just your keywords.

Remember that *trust and citation flow* are major parts of the new search paradigm. A metric introduced by Majestic (an SEO tool), trust flow—and topical trust flow—is all about the relevancy of the web page to the searcher. The more relevant and high-quality content you produce, the higher this trust flow, and the more Google will appreciate what you publish, and rank it highly. Linking follows the same principle: the more you produce content that people will love and naturally want to share, the more they will link to it (natural backlinks).

It's a cycle: create and promote great content, earn shares and links naturally since people love great content, get more visits to your content,

which creates more engagement, which means more links, which means more visits... You get the picture.

Evergreen content is content that is always relevant and fresh for your reader: not seasonal, not newsy, not timely. These are in-depth guides; long-form, 1,500+ word blog posts or articles that answer *every single question* on an “evergreen” topic, i.e. *how to trim my eyebrows*. Strive to create these pieces for each one of your major keywords.

Being engaging is a key in creating good online content. Writing to be engaging trumps SEO optimization. Don’t write just to fit in a few keywords and then post the content, but rather, write to engage your reader. Discuss and solve their problem. Be relatable. Your best skills in creating engaging content come with a lot of practice. Don’t be afraid to write dozens to hundreds of headlines to find the perfect, most engaging one. (More on headline creation in the upcoming chapters!)

2. Know the parts of HTML you’ll be creating as an online writer/publisher.

You should be familiar with the following bits of HTML, which you’ll probably create at some point as an online writer:

- **Meta description:** a description of your page in 156 characters, usually written inside the meta description area of the Yoast SEO plugin, if you’re creating the blog in WordPress. Example of a meta description: “*Learn how compounding blog posts can maximize your blog efforts enormously, gaining you more traction month after month. We’ll discuss in this blog guide.*”
- **Title tag:** appears in the title bar of your browser window for a page name. You’ll want to write the full topic of the page for this, something that fits inside the SEO title limitations (use the Yoast SEO plugin). Example: “*50 Weak Words and Phrases to Cut Out of Your Blogging.*”
- **Header tags:** your subheaders. Example of header tags for a

WordPress post with HTML: <h2>*How to Groom Your Active Dog: Poodle Grooming 101*</h2>.

3. Learn how to do keyword research.

SEO Writing + is my special grade for the writer who has the knowledge of keyword research in their back pocket (like the + on A+).

To begin determining the value of an SEO keyword, look at the relevance and value of the keywords that pull up for your seed list (simple terms that define your customer, or your clients' customers). Feature-rich keyword research tools are SEMrush, Wordtracker, AuthorityMetrics; simpler tools like KeywordTool.io, KWFinder.com, Übersuggest offer keyword-focused data, research, and suggestions only. Remember that many keyword analysis software programs have their own "identification" for a good keyword: a keyword score that rates a keyword 0-100 (highest being best). In SEMrush, this is the "KD," or Keyword Difficulty index; in Wordtracker, this is "KEI," or Keyword Effectiveness Index; and in KWFinder.com, this is "Diff" or Difficulty. Sort these scores by highest to see their top recommended keywords right away; but remember to use your judgment when picking keywords, as this is a machine factor and not always 100% relevant to your topic.

Your most important metrics for finding good keywords are:

- Relevance to your site/services
- Competition
- Search volume
- Commercial intent (aka CPC, Suggested Bid)
- *Is it long tail (is the person searching closer to a sale)?*

Long-tail keywords are winners because they are usually relevant to someone closer to a sale. Example: *organic juice bar in Austin* defines a

customer looking for *your* local juice bar in Austin rather than someone doing a general search for *a* juice bar.

Commercial intent relates to the *selling* nature of a keyword (does it include the words *buy now*, *affordable*, or is it a product/informational search?). This ties into competition, which refers to the amount of bids in dollars (CPC, Suggested Bid) going for sought-after keywords that show up in Google's Sponsored section.

The four keyword classes in the commercial intent category are:

- **Buy Now keywords**, that include “buy,” “shipping,” “discount,” “deal,” etc.
- **Product keywords**, like “cheap laptop,” “review of X brand/product/company,” “comparison,” “affordable”
- **Informational keywords**, like “how to,” “I need to”
- **Low-conversion keywords**, like searches with “free,” “download” included

When choosing keywords, hone down your choices by looking for:

- Relevant, long-tail keywords (they're closer to your “buying” customer)
- Low-competition keywords
- In tandem, balance that value with the amount of monthly searches on average

Remember that more isn't always the best with monthly searches. You do want to get a lot of traffic, but you don't want non-relevant traffic. In some cases, you might not find a lot of monthly search volume data at all for a niche, long-tail keyword with a location and specific service. It's OK; just research the seed keyword and add in the location as you write.

In this chapter, I've created two case studies for you, using examples of live keyword reports:

- *Case 1: Bob's Poodle Grooming Service*
- *Case 2: John's Denver, Colorado Family Law Practice*

4. Keywords are not as important as the overall message and value in your content: placement is key.

Remember, keywords are just the *start* of your online content creation efforts, and a small piece of the overall puzzle in successful online content.

Content first, keywords second.

Google will penalize you for using too many keywords, so never overuse them. Just use them naturally as you write your content. Optimize how you place them; don't worry about counting them. When you use keywords throughout your content, keep in mind these two rules regarding keyword placement:

- **Use the keyword in your headline, subheaders, and meta tag, just once.**
- **Body content:** In a blog, article, or web page, just use the keywords naturally.

5. A final takeaway is to stay on top of your SEO knowledge.

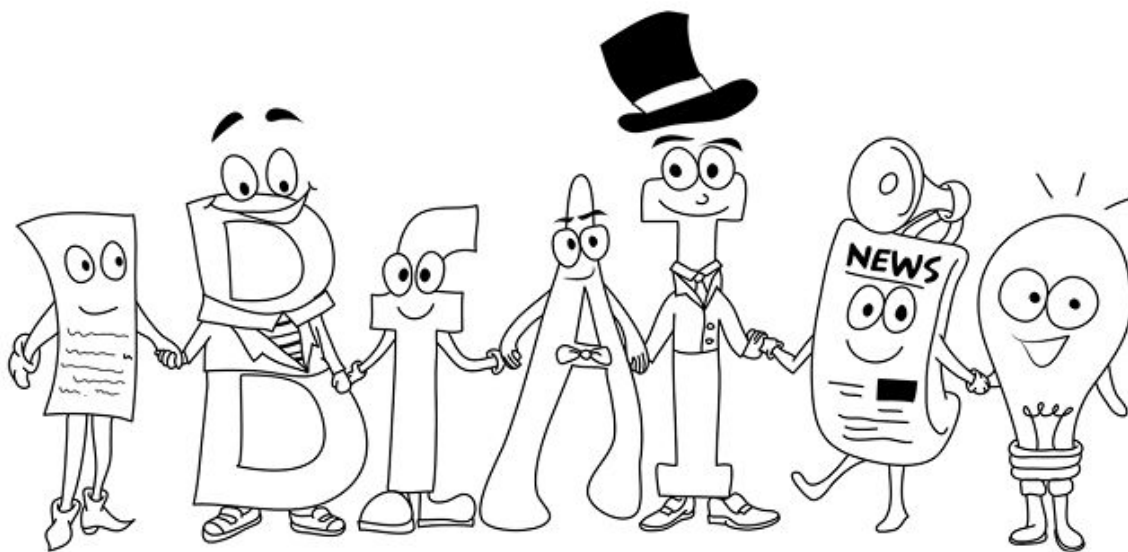
Check the Appendix for sites I recommend, which will help you grow and maintain your SEO writing skills.

In the next chapter, you'll move on to learning how to apply these newfound SEO skills in your everyday online content writing.

Ready? Let's dive in!

IV.

How to Adapt Your Writing to & Create the 7 Major Types of Online Content



Left to right: Web Content, Blogging, Social Media, Advertising/Sales Copy, Industry Writing, Journalism, and Creative Writing.

Before we begin, a note:
My book assumes you already know how to write well and put a string of grammatically correct words together. I'm not here to teach you that.

Good writing is the foundation that must prop up SEO knowledge and the ability to adapt your writing to all the online content types.

However, if you're not confident in your writing skills, but you know you have what it takes and you just need to refine your skills, here are a couple

of quick tips. Skip ahead to the next section if you're ready to write like a pro.

Going from a Writer to a Great Online Content Writer

If you know you have the passion, and you're excited to get started making money and bringing in results by writing great online content, but you're not 100% sure you have all the writing chops yet: the way to bring your writing skills up is to *practice, practice, practice*.

It's what I did when I started out. I was writing up to 50 pieces a day at 19 and 20 years old. I'll never regret those crazy times, because in the nitty-gritty of all that writing, I honed my best skills.

Here's some further inspiration. Ted Nicholas, one of the most successful direct response copywriters in history, writes up to *250 headlines* before he chooses one.¹

Your best practice as a writer comes from:

a) reading

b) writing, writing, writing with critique

How do you access good critique, as you write and hone your skills?

I was brave enough to amass a bunch of projects, charge entry-level rates, and accept clientele feedback as my grounds for learning. I wouldn't recommend this approach, because these clients got way too lucky with those rates, and today's content marketing industry warrants that you start out strong, with expertise. That way, you'll never have to work to gain "new" respect and change your reputation around from so-so writer to outstanding writer.

For general writing critique, Writing.com is a great way to have your content peer reviewed, and also, to forge relationships with other writers. You can build a portfolio there and upload content. I started out on Writing.com when I was about 12 years old, and I found an amazing, warm,

open community. You can also look up Facebook writing groups—there are a lot of them out there with members willing to critique good content that you post on the group’s page.

Just remember, both at Writing.com and in many Facebook groups, you won’t be able to get specific SEO and online writing focused critique; but they can certainly help you refine your overall writing flow and grammar skills.

(Since I haven’t found a lot of online writing geared critique groups, I started a Facebook group just for those who have read my book and are looking to grow in their online writing skills. I’ve listed my group in the Appendix.)

Let’s Create the Seven Types of Online Content

By now, you’ve learned the fundamental principles of using SEO while you write for an online audience.

Ready for my steps on how to create the seven major kinds of online copy? Let’s plunge in!

Your first rule of thumb in this chapter is to realize that you’ll need to *adapt* your writing skills to different types and styles of content.

Online content writing on the whole encompasses many different disciplines.

When we think about online writing, we have to consider all the different ways we create content for online entities. Simply put, online content writing is more than just writing blogs. It fills an entire *genre* of writing, and it’s because of the wide range of online writing that you must have flexibility in style.

As an online content creator, it’s important to know the major kinds of content that you could be crafting, so you can adapt your writing to them. And as promised, this is a guide, so we’ll delve into all these types.

Keep in mind that these are not mutually “inclusive,” meaning it’s

unlikely that one type of content would be able to “fill in” for another type of content. Because of the diversity of online content, it’s essential that we know exactly what we’re creating and what purpose it’s being used for.

Understanding the reasons why we create a piece of content helps us to decide which one of the broad categories it falls into. This is essential for us to know in order to write content correctly. For example, the style and tone of a social media post is far different than that of a web content page.

Let’s take a look at my list of seven content types again.

In essence, online content falls into one of these seven different categories:

- 1. Web Content**
- 2. Blogging**
- 3. Social Media**
- 4. Advertising/Sales
Copy**
- 5. Industry Writing**
- 6. Journalism**
- 7. Creative Writing**

Each of these writing styles has its own nuanced method of creating content. Creative writing, #7, encompasses a lot of things, by the way: including scripts and miscellaneous copy.

A word to the wise here: none of these content creation methods is *better* than any other. Each *fulfills* a particular purpose in the grander scheme of things, but all these methods can be categorized as online content. In order to become a skilled online content creator, it’s important to understand these different types of writing and what they mean to us as writers.

Starting with web content, I’m going to give you a thorough how-to guide and practical application for each of the seven types of content. Let’s start!

1. Web Content



A web content writer crafts main content that will be read by website visitors, like home pages, “about” pages, and service pages.

Web content must be unique to each site, which is why every site owner must either write his or her own content, or hire a writer. It should go without saying, but always be original. Plagiarism on the internet is just bad form—you’ll eventually get pointed out for it, and penalized by Google. I’ll share a tool in the Appendix that helps you make sure your writing is 100% original and not already posted anywhere else on the web.

As discussed earlier in my book, when I started out on this career path, businesses were just beginning to grasp the necessity of creating good online content. For many, though, it wasn’t actually *good* content; content was a matter of stuffing in a few relevant keywords throughout a paragraph of poorly written text, obtained from whomever was cheapest. Ads would do the rest, as far as conversion and sales. In 2011, I saw bad content consistently ranking very well on Google. And I mean *really* bad—written

by someone lacking a full understanding of English, or blatantly copied and pasted from someone else's site.

I am happy to report that today this crap doesn't fly. And I don't think it'll ever fly again.

SEO & Web Content Writing

Keep in mind everything you just read in my earlier chapter about SEO as you read the following section. It applies here.

If you're writing web page content for a client, many times they'll also need a fresh meta tag written for every new page of content. Even if you've never created a meta description until today, once you manage to write a couple dozen of them, these small blurbs will become second nature to you. You'll also need to keep in mind best practices and placements for your SEO keywords as you write web pages.

Just remember, as I've also mentioned earlier, never let *keywords* become the focus of your web pages; it's more important to think about the audience, how engaging you can make the home page content, and how polished the copy is, then to only think about keywords.

Why Web Pages Will Always Need Fresh Updates

This was a frequent question I got as a writer in my early online writing days.

Improving, updating, or rewriting content regularly on your website will ensure Google comes back and indexes your site regularly, then indexes any new pages that the homepage might be linking to. And getting indexed quickly means more rankings, traffic, exposure, and so on.

A lot of websites (including ours) serve up home page variations with a running swap of content that the server varies among different visitors. So, it's good to have a few versions of your homepage continually being written and tweaked for better results.

Tweaking your main areas of copy, however small—from a home page

header to two words on your click-through button—can mean more direct revenue, too. Joanna Wiebe, famed conversion copywriter, is a queen at crucial copy bits: those few, brief instances of text on call-to-action buttons and other critical areas. She has extensive studies posted all over the web with dozens of companies that she’s helped succeed online through conversion-oriented copywriting. Example: on a home page for a site that sold physical products to ship, she replaced “Estimate Shipping” on the shipping estimate tool button with “Fast, Affordable Shipping,” and generated 20% more ad conversion revenue for the company—just like that.² I recorded an episode for my podcast with Joanna as a guest expert discussing how she creates conversion copy; check it out on [The Write Podcast!](#)

So, even if a site has a well-written home page that was crafted months ago, they should be updating it every few months so it doesn’t stagnate. I fine-tune my site content regularly: tweak my calls-to-action, clarify my wording, purge any outdated or old product information, and change up what I’m featuring for the key product or service according to the season or industry focus. It’s important not to let your content become stale. Ongoing, fresh, manual (human review) content updates will always be a necessity.

Analyzing and refreshing your content in this way is more officially known as a *content audit* in the web world. I’ve put some links to in-depth guides on conducting a website content audit in the Appendix.

How to Create Web Content

Since everything’s easier when you have examples (or, *stories*)...

Let’s pretend you are the owner of *Krazy Kids*, an independent toy store and play land in Portland, Oregon.

As CEO, Head of Marketing, and main investor of Krazy Kids Toys, you’ve done your homework when it comes to keyword research. You now have a list of over 200 possible search terms, with wildly differing amounts

of monthly hits and competition: both long-tail, local keywords, and a few in the fat head variety.

Honing Down Your Keywords to Create Web Content

Money and time constraints won't allow you to have good content for all those keywords immediately – so, it's up to you to choose those that will bring you the most bang for your buck now.

This can be done through two main considerations: *search intent* and *keyword difficulty*.

Search Intent: The Art of Knowing What the Customer Wants

When a customer goes to Google and types in “toys” or “discount LEGO™ sets,” they're looking to fulfill a need. This “need” could be to learn something new, to plan a purchase for later, to buy something for their kid now, or to pass the time with a favorite hobby or interest until their lunch hour is over.

Remember our short summary on the commercial intent of keywords in the last chapter?

Well, that ties into this.

Some of these needs you can fulfill, while others you can't. Understanding what the potential customer wants will help you craft the right type of content.

While the exact personal circumstance and mood of each potential searcher may be impossible to predict, you can easily classify searchers' various intents as:

- **Transactional searches:** These are searches done with a specific and immediate task in mind: buying something (online or offline), repairing the sink, or finding the best pizza in the local mall. Anyone searching for “toys in Portland,” “discount

LEGO™ sets,” or “chemistry sets for kids,” has a need you can directly fulfill.

- **Navigational searches:** These searches are done with a website already in mind. For example, someone types in “Krazy Kids Toys” to go to your domain if they’re unsure of your full .com name.
- **Informational searches:** Possibly the largest group, these searches go after information itself, rather than information directed at accomplishing something. Browsing a news site, looking up strange symptoms or song lyrics, viewing the full filmography of Quentin Tarantino, or looking up the hottest new toys for your toddler turning two all fall under this category.

Since navigational searches already have something specific in mind, they are notoriously difficult to influence.

Transactional searches are the best at bringing in new immediate customers, but informational searches are a highly valuable tool for building brand loyalty and creating great online content. (Most of the keywords I optimize my content with nowadays are informational. Except for the occasional time I create a page, for example, around a more transactional keyword like *copywriting in Austin, Texas*.)

When looking at the amount of monthly searches, it’s easy to get overly excited about the possibility of owning the game for the top searches: there are more than 200 people Googling for “toys store Portland” within any given month, and hundreds more searching for each of the relatable keywords. Imagine if they were all to land on your site, and subsequently come in your door!

However, focusing only on the top keywords has a couple of downsides.

First, Krazy Kids is relatively new in town, and it’s also independently owned. While you might have big dreams of one day becoming the biggest toy retailer in the world, that may not be something you can accomplish

right away – and likewise, being in the top five results for “toys” may prove notoriously difficult and could take years of growth and careful positioning. These efforts flatten early business if you don’t have enough income to float your company while you build this serious growth.

Secondly, most searches on the fat head of the curve are vague and general. (Remember our section in the last chapter, Pick Your Fights: Long tail Versus Fat Head (or Head Tail)?) These searches may result from people who are likely just browsing, rather than actually looking to buy. The further down the tail you go, the more specific the search terms become, and the higher the conversion rates grow. A customer who’s looking for “water guns for sale in Portland”—which is exactly what you sell and have optimized your online content for—will most likely walk into your store and buy a water gun after finding your awesome site, rather than browsing endlessly and haphazardly going to the mall.

Once you’ve picked the fights you can *win*, and have determined which searches align best with what you sell, it’s time to plan the content you will create.

Ideally, whenever anyone searches for “toy stores in Portland,” they should land on the Krazy Kids home page. This is your toy store, and you want everyone in Portland to visit and shop at your store, of course. But all the other toy stores in Portland want that too—so how do you stand out?

Define What You’re All About

The first, most important way to differentiate yourself from other toy sellers is to focus on the specific benefits the customer will get from your store.

For example, let’s see what you, as the owner of Krazy Kids, can specifically offer your customer. Clients are not really interested in your store or your toys; they want to know what they will get out of it. You need to think of something unique, which puts you above the rest of the Portland toyshops. How about adding a fully supervised, baby-safe play area, stacked with sensory baby toys, baby book library, a large TV, and a stash

of kids' movies? You're going to give moms and parents the freedom to browse with the peace of mind that comes from knowing their kids are safe and having fun—and you're going to create the best in-store supervised play area that Portland has seen, yet.

What you can uniquely offer every customer that stands out from any competitor becomes your value proposition.

Your value proposition is the thing that makes your business unique, and will be a wonderful conversation opener when you're pitching yourself to potential customers, and a huge service perk to use and repeat throughout your website copy. There are just so many benefits that come from discovering and keying in on something *you* and only *you* do that is exceptional.

Define What They're All About

If we think of web-based sales as a *conversation*, then your product is but one-half of it. Take a few minutes to sink a little deeper into your customer's shoes and write down more specific information about your ideal customer before you create your web pages.

Krazy Kids Toys sells toys for kids, but are you really expecting six-year-old Timmy to shop on your website? Isn't it Timmy's parents and loved ones that you're really aiming for? What do they want? What are their priorities when buying something for little Timmy? What can you do for them to make the sales experience easier? How would you talk to them if you casually met at a café?

Max Out on Readability

Convenience is the keyword for a generation that spends much of its time online.

It's very important to make sure that each potential customer who lands on your web page finds everything they need quickly enough, without much

thought required on their part. Nowadays, most people on transactional searches don't read a full block of text – they merely skim to find relevant information, for, on average, *10 seconds*. (And if a site loads slowly, forget it; they'll be gone in 1-5 seconds.)³

This means an effective main (home, about) web page could be 350 to 400 words, or even far less. Your content on these main pages should be very brief, visual-based, and written with targeted, audience-appealing subheaders. Look at the home pages of Apple.com, and PayPal.com: they are extremely brief, with 2-10 sentences of copy max on their home page. For your major home page, write around your visuals, and don't be afraid to be short. Think of what will *appeal* the most to your visitors.

Your service or “landing” pages can be much longer. For best ranking results, I write my actual service pages (the pages describing each of the different writing services we offer) at a minimum of 1,000 words. I've seen Google rank my long-form service pages (with long-tail, low-competition keywords) within the top 10 results in a matter of weeks.

Also, in your content, take great care to make your *value proposition* (what we discussed earlier—your unique edge that puts you above your competitors) as easy as possible to understand. Integrate it into your taglines or visuals; place mentions throughout your body copy. What makes Krazy Kids stand out? A place where kids can be crazy, with free supervision, and parents can shop with full sanity. (Shoot, I'm talking myself into going shopping there tomorrow. My hyperactive toddler usually makes shopping trips quite the nightmare.)

Contact information (in case they want to visit) and call-to-action buttons (CTAs)—those that tell the customer to buy, visit, call, or subscribe to your newsletter—should also be placed where they will stand out.

How Do the Other Kinds of Web Content Fit In?

You won't just be writing home and about pages when it comes to writing web content.

You'll also be writing things like:

- Product descriptions
- Landing pages
- Meta descriptions and headers
- PPC copy

For these kinds of content, the same web content writing rules apply. My section on ad copy will be more relevant for most of the content for PPC ads, but for those online search-based ads, you'll still need to include SEO keywords.

Product descriptions are nearly always SEO-optimized for product keywords. They're usually not much more than 300 words long, and simple to write, unless you have a highly technical product that requires a lot of research. If you're allowed, a license to be creative is a *fantastic* way to put out some really engaging product descriptions. Especially those that integrate a true storytelling vibe, i.e., "once upon a time, there was a summer dress with dancing yellow daisies that made all the girls stop and gasp..." You could go in that direction if the client allows, for super original, creative copy.

I've touched on landing pages already, which are long-form web pages, often in the form of geographic, location-oriented or general service pages describing each service, product or offering the site owner sells. You'll just write these in the same style as web content, but remember to break up your text quite a bit, and include a CTA at the end (mention the brand and a way to contact them or access the specific offering you're discussing in the page).

Application: 6 Key Steps to Writing a Web Page

1. Get a list of good, relevant keywords together.
2. Hone a list of the major keywords from the minor, less useful ones.

3. Write the site pages using relevant keywords. Know whom you're talking to. If your client has a specific tone to match, know and match that. Be informational, engaging, and useful.
4. Break up the pages with sections: think subheaders and easy-to-read paragraphs.
5. Double-check your SEO and write meta descriptions for the page if needed (if posting to a site, WordPress plugins like Yoast can tell you what you need to optimize in the content).
6. Proofread thoroughly before you hit publish or send.

2. Blogging



Blog stands for “weblog,” which is a record of a person’s opinions in an easily readable format, shared online. The blog started out in the 1990s as a way to communicate with the rest of the world and give people entertaining insights. Today, this medium has grown far beyond its simple origins.

How Blogging Is a Powerful Form of Online Content Today

If I were asked to explain what the internet was like to people who lived

before the 20th century, I would tell them that it is the collected knowledge and experience of a large portion of the human species.

OK, maybe not that fancy, but it's a good way to put it.

The internet has made it easy for people to share their opinions about any topic under the sun. All you need to do to see this is to conduct a simple search followed by the word “blog.” There are fashion blogs on how to style your hair for prom. Poodle blogs. Shoe blogs. Cleaning your car blogs. How to clean your cat's claws blogs. It gets even more intense. You name the niche; there's a blog for it.

Today, I firmly believe that blogs are a huge, huge catalyst for online traffic and SEO rankings, if utilized correctly.

Businesses that don't have a blog are missing out, big time.

Here's why: a blog, in itself, is ready to match all the standards of Google, as long as you can supply *good content*—find the time to blog, or hire a matching, knowledgeable industry writer to commit to the quality and frequency of publishing your blog.

Google likes consistent, good content that provides answers to the questions its users search for. A blog provides *just that* platform opportunity: the opportunity for frequent and fresh publications, with the ability in WordPress (with plugins like Yoast, which I've described earlier) to correctly SEO-optimize every single post.

Your imagination is the limit when it comes to what you can create with a blog: you just need to get serious about committing to and cultivating a blog.

A blog is not an overnight achievement: but with consistency and creativity, over time, your blog becomes an achievement, and you'll start reaping and seeing real rewards.

With the right creative inspiration and writing, blogs can go viral, which provides huge exposure. One of my blogs received over 4,000

StumbleUpon shares inside 24 hours, resulting in a huge spike in our website traffic and subsequent leads. It was a very thorough blog post (I've mentioned it before in my book): "50 Weak Words and Phrases to Cut Out of Your Blogging." I modeled this blog after a really popular post from one of my favorite bloggers, with my own thoughts and perspectives added in. It took several weeks to research the background information, and then put the list of 50 words together accurately. My COO, Josh, created a custom visual for the featured image:



And 4,000 StumbleUpons are really nothing. Some of the most-shared blogs have received millions of shares on social media.

So my point here is, if you really take the time and investment that good blogging requires, you are going to see stellar results. My blogging efforts have resulted in thousands of shares—with my primary investment being my time and what I invest in the additional team members I've trained to help me create my content. The resulting marketing and customer conversion from my blogging efforts has been worth several hundred times what I've put into blogging.

To summarize, blogging is *worth it*. Just be prepared to put in the elbow

grease and work at creating a masterpiece out of every post; and expect long-term, not immediate, results.

How to Write Blogs

Blogs can be created for all niches and industries, but they usually fall into two major categories: business or personal. If you're a ghostwriter for bloggers, you might be writing blog content from a business or an individual perspective. A lot of businesses come to us for blog content. They're usually too busy (and many times don't have the skills) to write their own blog posts. We get them a best-fit writer who stays committed to a consistent blogging schedule.

The marketing benefits of a blog include:

- Audience growth, reputation & trust online, exposure and shares on social media
- The rankings a blog achieves on Google

Also, all of these marketing gains from a blog are huge reasons why your blog posts need to be *really* good—informative, well researched, thorough, and above average.

Many blogs have a preferred tone (fun, creative, or professional)—or, you can just match your writing style to their business or individual style by looking at their site and profile. They'll also need SEO keywords utilized in their blog, in most cases. Blog writing can be fun, because you'll typically have a little more freedom with creativity and topic opportunities than with a web page, which is more about conversion and thus, more sales-oriented.

Just how do you go about writing good blog content? Here are a few key thoughts on that.

Your Blog's Headline Is Key

First, your headline is *crucial*. Remember that most people won't click through to read your blog if you have a weak headline. Take your time to really craft a good one.

Just to be clear: I'm not talking buzz-worthy, turn-your-head type of headlines here. I don't think creating headlines for the sake of headlining is an evergreen, long-lasting strategy. Worthwhile headlines should accurately *capture a picture of the content inside* in a way that's *appealing to your reader*.

Always include your keyword in your headline, if the post is written and optimized naturally for that keyword. If you *don't* have an audience, I suggest starting with your keyword list and building great blogs around it; that's a great way to start getting found online. But once you have an audience, it's completely fine to write fun, audience-relevant, attention-grabbing blogs without thinking about keywords now and then. Some of the most famous bloggers, like Seth Godin, write without a thought to keywords: they have a tremendously huge audience waiting to eat up anything they post. Some of my blogs, like *30 Amazing, Obsolete Words in the English Dictionary We Should Bring Back to Life*, or even one of our Twitter chat recap blogs, are written without a keyword term in mind. I usually add a focus keyword to the Yoast section, but it's generated by the topic only and isn't from a researched keyword list. (Example: for our Twitter chat recap blogs, like the one posted for *#ContentWritingChat March 8 2016 Recap: Best Practices for Content Curation in 2016*, the keyword is just the chat hashtag: ContentWritingChat.)

Back to writing your headline: I usually finalize my headline *after* I've written my blog. This way I have a whole picture of what I just wrote in my head.

And as I discussed before, a good strategy to hone your headline skills is simply to create *a lot of headlines* per blog to find the perfect one.

Remembering your goal with headlines, to create accurately in a way that

really draws a viewer in (who typically has a short attention span), there are some tools to help you create great headlines out there.

I have a list of my favorite headline tools in the Appendix; these are great to help me know if I'm on the right footing. I really like the Advanced Marketing Institute's Emotional Marketing Value Headline Analyzer. Every time I've worked on a headline enough to where it gets a 35-50% score, hitting the empathic, intellectual or spiritual radar in the results, I've seen more than average shares on that blog after it's published.

Spend time on your headline. Make sure it's great; if you want it to stand out from the crowd of blogs out there, you'll need to put in the work.

Think “Worthwhile” with Your Blog Content

If the value proposition you give on your website is the ice-breaker you use when meeting someone new, then your blog is the engaging, information-filled dinner discussion that lasts until late at night.

Your blog is your chance to build a *loyal fan* rather than a one-time customer.

Rather than impress with a clever slogan bragging that you're the best, *show* them what makes you the best.

I know I've already made this point, but I can't express enough how vital blogs are to your online marketing. Think of it like the eggs to a cake. Any company (or person) missing out on blogging is missing the main ingredient of what a website is all about. But you have to create *truly worthwhile* blogs to see the best results.

With the right foundations, writing blog posts can be a simple method of content creation. In the wider scheme of things, your blog content creation needs to tie into your knowledge of keyword research and what sort of keywords are most likely to bring people to your blog via search. Utilizing your keywords, you can start creating content that appeals to your audience in the form of blogs that address certain aspects of your industry.

In the past, blog writing wasn't something a lot of companies considered, because they didn't see the point of having a blog if their main aim was sales. Google's paradigm for value-based search results that rates websites based on their relevance and the quality of their content, rather than just content inclusive of keyword density, has made it all the more important to have high-quality blog content that will attract readers who may eventually, and naturally, become customers.

You're the Owner at Krazy Kids, and Ready to Blog...

Back to our toy store.

Here's one good blog post you could start with right away: an exploration of the topic "Top {insert #} Toys for Your {Baby/Toddler/Age Group} Boy/Girl for {Insert Holiday/Birthday etc.}."

Customize that topic according to what's popular in and for seasons, ages, and genders; do your research, and provide useful content. Your topic should include key action verbs and descriptors, like "want", and "best" or "top" for describing the item (toys).

A great way to get started writing a good blog is to open it by being relatable. Pique the interest of the reader on the topic you're writing about, right from the start.

You could write up a description of the problem that your readers might be facing, or give them insight (a sneak peek) into the advice you're going to give.

I've heard in the past that "negative" intros aren't good, but actually, if you present the exact problem the reader has, you have a *much* better chance of keeping them reading. They now want to hear how *you* solve their problem! Some of the most-shared bloggers in the world write their intros using this technique.

Research, Cite, & Use Subheaders

While you write your blog, always incorporate research and citations.

A *citation* is just anchor (display) text that is hyperlinked back to a website.

For example: in the phrase “there are more than 3.2 billion people using the internet,” I’d hyperlink the phrase *3.2 billion* or *people using the internet* back to the link where I found this information, <http://www.internetlivestats.com/internet-users/>. Think of cohesive phrases that key in on your stated fact when you choose which words to place your link on. To come up with citations, research and find solid statistics online to back up your declarative statements and make your content more powerful (for example: don’t just say the internet is big, tell us that there are 4.54 billion pages indexed online, and link to your source, WorldWideWebSize.com).

Always properly source your claims in your web content. Be sure to track down the actual root source: don’t settle for a link that’s linking to the real source.

Don’t forget to use subheaders and properly break up your content as you write, too. To see my subheader examples, refer back to Chapter III, *The Role of SEO in Online Content Writing & How to Use Keywords*, section 3 on header tags.

Finally, after the blog is written, you can add a small one-sentence blurb at the very end to promote what the site sells or offers—making it relevant and relatable to the blog post itself. Some good alternatives to a direct product link could be an ebook that further describes your services or is a thorough guide on a relevant topic, to drive a user-conversion opportunity.

Word Count: Long Is Better Than Short for Blogs!

Remember my section on *The Evergreen Phenomenon*?

Long content is valuable and evergreen, if it’s created within quality standards. Many blogs on the web, including guest-authored blogs (and most of mine), are long-form content blogs that are as much as 1,500-2,000 words in length.

Studies done by marketers online have since shown that Google ranks blogs that are over 2,000 words *higher* than blogs that are only 500 words or so.⁴

However, depending on what you're trying to accomplish with the post, the length can vary drastically, and rightly so.

Knowing what you're writing for enables you to plan your blog post so that it falls within the desired word count. Be aware, though, that word counts are fluid. You don't ever have to hit a number squarely on the head, or think that any number is "the magic one."

Another benefit of writing long-form blog content is that you can truly expand on and dissect a topic within that longer word count. This gives you the opportunity to help readers really understand a question or topic that your blog addresses, and it's a great path to becoming a thought leader with the content you provide.

Just make sure it's *worth* the word count: if you're "filling text" at any point, stick to a shorter amount.

Images in Blogging

Visuals are huge for blogging. And they're an absolute *must* for engagement. People are probably not even going to read or share your blog without at least one or two good images.

Wherever you can, fit in a visual for your blog posts—and take some time to invest creatively in your imagery. Don't just grab any old stock photo or copy off of Google Images. In an over-used stock image world, readers will know immediately what images took you effort and time, and which ones did not. There are some really cool, free stock photo sites with unique, striking photographs available. I've listed a resource put together by my team on this in the Appendix section.

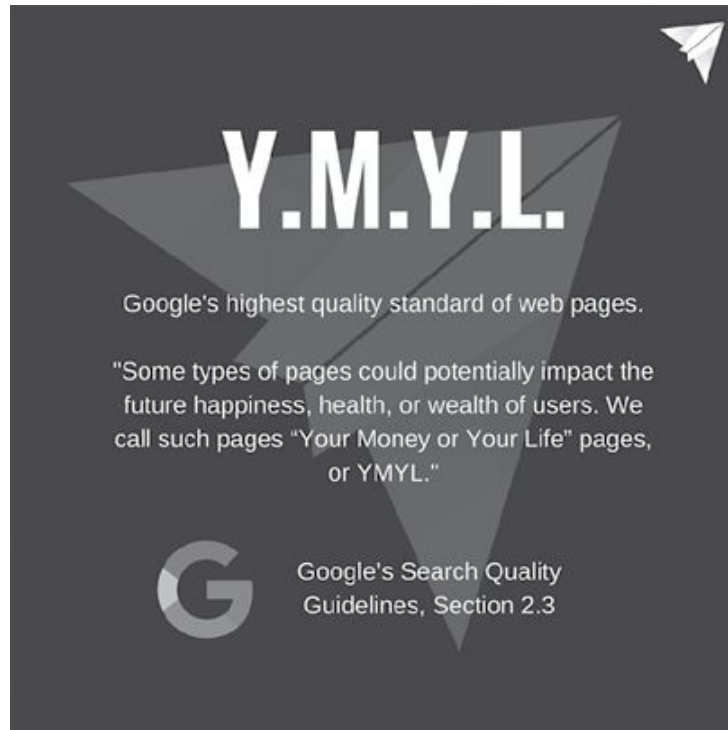
Canva is an amazing free image creation tool that makes it easy for even a non-designer to create beautiful visuals. I personally love it. The tool itself is free; you only pay if you want to use their stock images or certain

features/layouts. My team and I use Canva regularly to create our blog images (topic and brand identification is designed and integrated onto our images). We also buy stock photos to add to the Canva backgrounds.

It's great to include visuals like GIFs when you can, too. These are highly engaging—a moving image embedded right there into your blog. You can even embed YouTube videos or social media posts. To go the extra mile and engage your readers, don't just screenshot an Instagram post or a Twitter tweet for inclusion in your blog post; grab the actual embed code and put that in the non-visual HTML editor (click Text in the Visual/Text tabs) part of your WordPress post. The embed code will show up as a live social media visual right in your blog. These are great interactive opportunities inside your blog.

When Google's Search Quality Evaluator Guidelines were released in 2015, my team and I put together a 3,000+ word blog post explaining the new guidelines⁵ and created these two visuals (using Canva) to illustrate the two key acronyms Google used:





I've since re-purposed those visuals for even more exposure in my guest blogs at SEMrush, Search Engine Journal, and Site Pro News.

If you're getting truly serious about good blogging, brand *infographics* are completely worth the investment. I discuss more on infographics in the social media section in this chapter, but for a brief mention here, infographics work well simply as published blog posts (that's how I publish my infographics). Write (Infographic) at the end of the published title you're using for your infographic, upload a high-quality copy of the infographic into the post, post the written copy (this will boost the SEO traction of your otherwise visual post), and publish as a blog. These visuals get more traction and social media shares than just a written post—ours gain, on average, 150-200% more engagement than our blog posts. You can even repurpose these, since they're a graphic, without any penalty hits from Google for duplicate content. There's even such a thing as *gifographics*—an infographic with moving GIF parts. We created one for our brand,⁶ and it gained a good amount of social engagement and traction.

Application: 6 Key Steps to Writing Great Blogs

1. Figure out what type of content you are creating and for whom (short-form/long-form, individual/business, audience style and type).
2. Assemble your keywords for the blog.
3. Create an accurate, catchy headline that utilizes your main keyword or key phrase (use headline creation tools; I have a list in the Appendix).
4. Develop, research for, and write original, unique content, and catchy subheaders; break up text appropriately, and check word counts.
5. Write your meta descriptions, and if you're in WordPress, optimize your tags and categorize for SEO.
6. Create and upload images/visuals/GIFs related to your blog posts.

3. Social Media



Social media is the obvious evolution of interactions between creator and consumer.

It has been estimated by Statista that by 2018, there will be more than 2.5

billion users on social media.⁷ That accounts for about a **third** of the world's population.

Social media comes in a variety of forms, each appropriate to the type of audience you are dealing with. Besides running your own Facebook, Instagram, or other social media profile to promote yourself and your services, as an online writer, you'll also be responsible for writing social media posts that will appeal to the audiences of businesses and commercial entities.

Depending on how much you know about a particular topic, this may be right up your alley—but it takes just a bit of finesse to write posts for a social audience.

The best part about social media is the level of interaction it encourages. No business is without excuse for an opportunity to engage with and attract fans that can subsequently translate into customers through social media.

Creating content for social media is, I think, rather fun. Let's dive in.

How to Write for Social Media

Social media content works best when it's catchy, brief, and engaging, and grabs the attention of the reader usually in tandem with an image, video, or link.

In fact, this content type usually utilizes images or video heavily with a limited amount of written content. So, you don't have to write a *ton* of stuff; you should be brief, and know how to capture your readers' attention in literally seconds.

Here are a couple examples. First, a simple sentence and image Facebook post from our friends at Poo~Pourri:



Next, here's a tweet I posted for my company profile on Twitter, @ExpWriters; an image quote with a brief sentence advertising our services:



Express Writers @ExpWriters · Jan 7

Let this be thy motto for 2016...and if thou dost not write, hire thy friends at expresswriters.com

"Either write something
worth reading or do
something worth writing."

Benjamin Franklin

16 10

Creating content for social media requires a *solid* understanding of your audience—in order to give them what they truly want.

Here's the catch: your reader has a short attention span. Modern society has influenced our behavior so that the average human being now has a shorter attention span than those who lived just 20 years ago.

Well-written social media copy grabs the reader's attention from the get-go.

That's why a lot of content producers for social media try to combine written and visual-based content to build something that is easily shareable and distributable across the entire spectrum of social media.

Social media, in itself, has *opened up* the world of marketing.

Businesses can now touch base with customers on a whole new level. When running a social media business page, it's important to remember that the reputation of a business depends on how you interact with its customers on their account. So, don't just post your content and think your job is done: you should also check the comments and engage back with customers. Your level of engagement will, in many cases, determine whether that person becomes a truly engaged fan or not. If they get a reply from you, they are

far more motivated to keep following you, because you've just created a relationship!

When you create statuses for businesses, whether in a tweet or Facebook post format, think short and brief. The average social media reader is scrolling by. So, grab their attention—whether it's with a fun short sentence promoting a blog, or a brief tweet to announce details about a PR event.

Follow Industry Influencers & Practice, Practice, Practice

The best way to create successful social media content is not by reinventing the wheel, but by studying what others are already successfully doing.

Look at successful companies on social media, and practice replicating what they do. Start by finding the influencers in your industry. BuzzSumo is a fabulous tool to use here. (It's listed in my Appendix with links to their guides that offer more on this topic.)

Once you have a BuzzSumo account, you can find influencers almost instantly by going to the *Amplification* tab and searching a topic or name under *Twitter Influencers*. BuzzSumo even lets you create outreach lists and has an audience builder tool. I'd highly recommend this amazing tool for conducting social media outreach correctly; I've seen big results by connecting with my industry influencers that I discovered through it.

Here's a screenshot of the top influencer for *content marketing* in the Twitter Influencers search box, via BuzzSumo:

The screenshot displays the BuzzSumo Pro web application. The top navigation bar includes 'Content Research', 'Amplification', and 'Monitoring'. Below this, the 'Twitter Influencers' tab is selected. On the left, a 'Filter by Type' sidebar lists categories like Bloggers, Influencers, Companies, Journalists, Regular People, Active Influencers, and Ignore Broadcasters, all of which are checked. The main search area shows the query 'content marketing' with a search button and an 'Export' option. Below the search bar, a search tip is provided. The results list the top influencer, Joe Pulizzi (@joepulizzi), with his profile picture, name, handle, and website. To the right of his profile, there are buttons for 'Unfollow', 'View Links Shared', and 'Save Influencer'. A 'PAGE AUTHORITY' score of 84 is also displayed.

Go follow the people that show up in BuzzSumo as Twitter Influencers for your niche or industry search term, and start building and forming a relationship with them through engagement; also, see what they are doing so you can be inspired.

When it comes to writing your actual posts for social media, remember: *practice, practice, practice* makes perfect. You can practice first by creating great content for your own profiles. Start compiling a sheet of 50+ written posts. When you write, remember “less is more” for many posts that will include a blog or link—a short blurb is all you might need. You’ll be off to the races if you write a few practice posts every day and take time to study various companies who are successful in social media. It can even be Target or your favorite snack company. Corner Bakery Café and Applebee’s are two companies with a great presence on Twitter.

Although social media writing is varied, it is by no means difficult for a naturally gifted writer. It allows you to express your personality, to be creative, and to have fun. You’re writing to directly engage the real reader—so keeping it “real” on social media, and being fun, brief, and engaging are your best bets.

Today, we’re also seeing the rise of long-form content on social media. LinkedIn is considered a social media site, and they’re now allowing users to directly post articles from their LinkedIn accounts. Many top LinkedIn users posting under their professional avatar are using a ghostwriter to do the research and produce high-quality content that will get a lot of traffic. Facebook has launched a long-form content platform, Articles, and Twitter is even discussing doing away with the 140-character tweet character limit very soon,⁸ as I’ve mentioned earlier. So, there’s no telling how much of social media content will soon become long-form. Short form will never go out of style—but there will probably be a more healthy mix of long form and short form for social content coming up.

Social media in all its forms offers a channel for us to create and share compelling and engaging content. Some of it might be bite-sized (e.g., a

tweet) and some might be entire posts of long-form content with thousands of words (e.g., a LinkedIn article post).

Knowing what your audience wants reigns as one of the most important factors of good writing for social media. Write what will *immediately catch* your reader's attention.

Content Curation vs. Creation

Content curation: collecting and sorting content.
(Wikipedia)

Worth a mention here is the topic of content curation versus content creation.

You know all those times you reshared something you loved that was published by someone else—whether a big brand or a single influencer? That's *content curation*.

Finding and resharing other content you love in the same vertical you're in (for me, that's pretty wide: SEO, content marketing and copywriting) is critical. You don't want to miss out on this if you write and publish social media content. This is a huge opportunity to also connect with influencers that are active on social media; if you share what they post, mentioning them, there's a good possibility you'll catch their eyeball. Do that enough, and you'll be on their radar. This is exclusive to influencers that really do engage on social media. I usually check my Twitter notifications twice a day, which get out of hand at 99+ if I let them accrue all day. A few times per day, I check out the people mentioning my content. I'll favorite their tweet and follow them if they're appealing to me.

Now if you're a writer, most of the time you'll be *creating* for the client, and they'll do the resharing or curation; unless you're totally managing their social media for them. In that case, be sure to work out a content curation plan for them, where you're sharing other content from top influencers in their industry or niche.

There's no specific golden number as to the amount of curation vs.

creation, but I myself balance a sharing ratio of around 70/30: 30% curation, 70% creation. Seventy percent of what I share is my own created content, whether it's resharing one of my web pages with a brief blurb, or one of the numerous blogs I post. Thirty percent are those instances when I share my favorite new article from HubSpot or an industry influencer.

I've recorded an episode for The Write Podcast with guest expert Guillaume Decugis, the CEO of Scoop.it, a leading content curation platform with over two million members. Guillaume's expertise on content curation is second to none. [Check it out in my iTunes episode list!](#)

On Shareability & Virality

Vi-ral-i-ty. Noun. The tendency of an image, video, or piece of information to be circulated rapidly and widely from one internet user to another; the quality or fact of being viral. (Wikipedia)

Sometimes, social media content goes viral. A piece of content spreads like wildfire across social media, not unlike a virus, causing people to feel the need to share it immediately with all of their online friends.

The virality of a piece of content comes directly from how *shareable* that content is. That's why many content producers on social media have started to use content with higher interaction stats to spread their messages.

Regarding virality, I'd say: social media content need not be complicated or complex.

Sometimes all it takes is a single, creative sentence paired with a visual that resonates highly with the audience. And sometimes, it takes weeks of research, creation, and promotion to create one piece of content that goes viral.

Here's an example from the Coca-Cola Facebook page of one sentence + one visual that garnered over 200,000 likes:



(The light sabers portrayed are actually in blue and red colors, by the way, so you get the full picture.)

What really encourages people to share things on social media is an intriguing point of debate among experts in the field of psychology. Recent studies into the phenomenon have shown that people tend to share things that resonate with them *personally*. If you can get someone to identify with a piece of content, they will be much more likely to share it.

They also discovered that emotionally sensitive posts have a much greater chance of being shared than those that appeal to logic, or deep thought. Happy posts and those that encouraged positive emotions were more likely to go viral than those that focused on negative emotions.

It sounds rather simple: be happy, share happiness, and others will want to engage with that.

Utilizing emotions in order to send a message that will be received well is something that most writers can learn to do.

Whether it's creating ad copy, a blog post, or a book, a good writer considers what the reader would be thinking, and tries to fully answer or solve their problem to a point where the reader will love their content and crave for more.

That's why the books that affect us the most deeply tend to resonate throughout our entire lives, and even become the yardstick by which we measure our experiences in the real world.

Back to our toy store...

We can easily create content that will resonate with parents, the audience members most likely buying our toys. Creating content for this audience with writing and imagery geared towards parents allows us to make ourselves noticeable on social media and stand out to the ideal target audience. You'd want to create social media content around any blogs that you've written or that the client has already posted on their blog—writing a descriptive blurb and linking back to an informative blog post is a key way to create user-centric social media posts.

Remember the blog topic we discussed for our toy store? “Top {insert #} Toys for Your {Baby/Toddler/Age Group} Boy/Girl for {Insert Holiday/Birthday etc.}.”

If it's nearing Easter, we could write something like:

- **Twitter:** “Need a list of favorite age appropriate toys for your little girl this Easter? *Link to blog*”
- **Facebook:** “Treat your little girl (or niece, granddaughter, favorite little person) to something special this Easter: her new favorite toy. Parents have already done the research and approved. Here are top favorite toys for 3-6 year old girls: *link*”

You could add a few relevant hashtags, like #Easter, #girl, #toys, #daughter, etc. to a visual-based Instagram post. If you link to the blog on Instagram, I've found it's best to place it where it's clickable: in your profile.

It's always, always a good idea to create custom images just for your social media sharing. We create a branded image for every blog that gets directly uploaded to our social media profiles as well as Instagram. Quotes, whether from someone famous or pulled internally from one of your own blogs or articles, designed on a simple, eye-catching background graphic, are a great idea for attractive, highly-engaging visuals that you can share on social media. Canva, as I've mentioned before, is a fantastic tool for creating your simple social media visuals. (Link is listed in the Appendix.)

On Writing Infographic Copy

Infographics are a fantastic type of content to publish on social media. These allow us to use our creative writing skills, along with good design and visuals from a solid web designer—combining the best of both elements (copy, design)—into an easily shareable, attractive content format. Enter the infographic.

It's awesome: I've seen triple the amount of shares on one of our company infographics as opposed to a normal blog post of ours. The only limitation here is pricing: you'll pay at least \$1,000 for a good infographic, including the necessary research (don't skimp, research thoroughly and make sure you find and list original sources), copy and design. So, you might want to budget for only a few infographics each year or quarter, and increase your budget as business allows. Just one or two published on your site here and there will boost your brand, increase your shares and engagement, and grow your fan base tremendously.

Now, specifically for writing infographic copy, I thought I'd share some tips. I see a gap in knowledge on how to write really good, substantial infographic content all the time.

The fundamental secret here lies in *being thorough and investing the time and resources to research.*

If you're writing infographic copy, you'll need to utilize solid research, brevity, and good headline writing skills. Write short, impactful sentences that can be designed onto graphics. Create a lot of headers and break up your text. List your citations at the end.

To show you what solid infographic content on its own (pre-design) looks like, here's an example of infographic content my team and I wrote for our infographic titled *How to Repurpose Your Content Correctly*. This was designed into a beautiful, vertically long final infographic on our site.

How to Repurpose Your Content Correctly (Infographic)

Why Should You Repurpose Content?

- Approximately 15% of Americans listen to podcasts of repurposed content, and the number is growing each year.
- Tweets with visual content get 18% more clicks, 89% more favorites, and 150% more re-tweets.
- Repurposed content helps make your content more impactful as 67% of people are likely to be convinced by a presentation that includes visuals.
- An infographic is 30 times more likely to help you get views than an article.
- Kissmetrics' infographics received an average of 20,859 likes on Facebook.
- An average of 62% of podcast listeners surveyed have said they are likely to buy something advertised on a podcast.
- 70% of many major businesses say videos are a highly effective aspect of their content marketing.

Why Twitter Should Be a Focus for Your Repurposed Content

- Studies show that you'll get the most use out of Twitter if you tweet up to 30x a day, while small business owners do better around 5 tweets/day.
- A tweet usually has a "life" of 18 minutes. That's why you want to tweet often: the more you tweet, the more you will see engagement.
- **Link to your blogs and content, often:** 50% of all re-tweeted tweets contain links.
- Re-sharing your content is vital on Twitter: you can get just as many if not more re-tweets on your second, third and fourth posts of the same blog.
- Use different headlines as you tweet. Your unique second headline can get double the amount of clicks.
- Going viral is more possible on Twitter than Facebook because of the immediate traction tweets get. Facebook posts have a shelf life of 5 hours.

6 EASY Ways to Repurpose Your Content

1. **Make a Presentation.** Turn your blog post into a presentation on SlideShare. Make a few graphics and put them into the program, and you have new, repurposed content.
2. **Turn Old Blog Posts into Guides.** Old blog posts provide a lot of excellent content to be repurposed. Assemble the multiple blogs you've written on a topic and turn them into an easy-to-access guide with multiple aspects.
3. **Use Your Evergreen Content.** One of the best types of content to repurpose is evergreen content. This gives you more topics to work with, and helps you create something that will still be worthwhile in the future.
4. **Create Infographics from Written Content.** Do you have a favorite blog that you want more people to read? Consider

chopping it down into short points and putting them in infographic form.

5. **Host a Podcast Based Off of a Blog Post.** Podcasts are a hot commodity right now, and your written content provides some great resources for one. Look at your popular posts and then host a podcast talking more in-depth on them.
6. **Turn Your Content into Powerful Videos.** Your existing written content can be used as visuals in multiple ways, including video. Brand videos made from content you already have can reach more people and bring in new customers.

5 Great Tools for Repurposing Content

1. **SlideShare.** This is a great tool to add your visual content to, creating a presentation you can give out to your clients. Try it when repurposing your content for maximum audience reach.
2. **Visual.ly.** Do you want to create an infographic but don't know how or have a web designer? Then try out Visual.ly. It helps you create infographics even if you aren't knowledgeable in infographic design.
3. **YouTube.** This is the best channel to share your videos on to reach out to a wide audience. When you repurpose written content into videos, always make sure you have a YouTube channel set up for them.
4. **Social Media Channels.** Every single social media channel offers you the chance to repurpose content whether it is on Twitter, Pinterest, or Instagram. Research different ones to find which will benefit your business the most.
5. **List.ly.** Lists are amazing, aren't they? People love lists, which makes this program excellent to use for your repurposed content. Simply break your content down into a list format, update this program, and share with your audience.

Full Reference List

Kevan Lee, Buffer | <http://buff.ly/1eEKhlQ>
CityRoom | <http://buff.ly/1eEKfdY>
WordStream | <http://buff.ly/1dcIaVS>
HubSpot | <http://buff.ly/1eEKjKv>
Inc.com, Larry Kim | <http://buff.ly/1eEKplj>
Brafton | <http://buff.ly/1eEKwxu>
Salma Jafri, Search Engine Watch | <http://buff.ly/1eEKzt8>
Arnie Kuenn, CMI | <http://buff.ly/1eEKGvY>
CoSchedule | <http://buff.ly/1eEKJR9>
Outbrain | <http://buff.ly/1eEKKVc>

Notice the sections:

- We open with powerful stats that back up our topic and why we're discussing it.
- We focus on a main point to bring in that is of real value to the reader.
- Then, we present a list of actionable tips on the topic.
- Lastly, we list the best tools to aid in doing these steps (which also backs up and strengthens our topic).
- Finally, we list all of our key research references at the end (we used the Buffer app to shorten the links into buff.ly links).

Every good infographic will incorporate these key copywriting (and research) ingredients. Your best bet is to find professional assistance to create the visuals in your infographics; a high-quality, experienced web graphics designer will know things like what color codes jive with the audience, your brand, the topic, etc. Without this knowledge and skill, an infographic will come out looking cheaply made; and remember, you're in an era of content marketing that requires quality to stand out.

Lastly, you could co-brand and create an infographic with another

company that has more research abilities than you do. For an infographic on Topical Trust Flow, we partnered with BuzzSumo, who was able to pinpoint and share with us direct pieces of data regarding millions of articles.

For our toy store, a good infographic example could be the “*The Life Cycle of a Toy*,” illustrating how a baby attaches to a toy emotionally. Then, carry this theme into childhood, showing the audience which toys children attach most strongly to, examining both genders and their preferences, etc.

Application: 4 Steps to Writing Good Social Media Content

Overall, when writing for social media, it’s crucial to consider its impact on the entire marketing strategy of the business. In no other type of online publishing is the writing and content *so intrinsically* linked to the overall marketing strategy.

Even simple but well-crafted posts on social media, such as status updates, can attract customers and direct them to your blog and website.

And even if you don’t have a ton of “likes,” favorites or re-shares on every post, it doesn’t mean you don’t have viewers. I get a lot of direct traffic from our Facebook page, even though it looks like a ghost town in terms of likes or shares.

Writing for social media takes a bit of practice, a little foresight, and a thorough understanding of what you want to accomplish with your work.

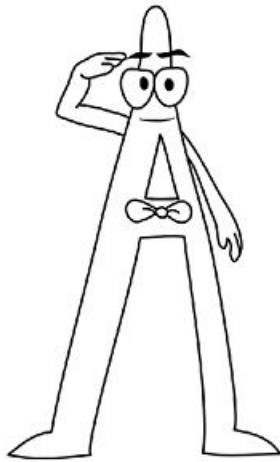
Once you know *why* you’re creating content for social media, the type of content you have to create will be obvious.

To summarize:

1. Determine the purpose of the social media posts you’re creating (brand awareness, directing potential leads to blog posts, building an audience, etc.).
2. Pinpoint your target/ideal audience for the posts.
3. Find or create the image/content/blog that you are going to share.
4. Share the image or link across your social media profiles along

with a fun blurb (your written piece of content in the post) that makes people want to read, engage with, or share the piece, tailored to each platform. Keep your blurb within the platform's character/word limits, and remember that "less is more" as you write. One sentence usually does the trick. It can be a good idea to throw in a few related hashtags, but write most of your posts without them (unless you're on Instagram). Studies have shown hashtags can detract from click-throughs.

4. Advertising/Sales Copy



Ever thought about the people behind the big billboard and TV advertisements?

If you've managed to catch an episode of AMC's *Mad Men*, you already know part of the answer. This TV series follows a set of advertising executives who operate out of Madison Avenue: a place whose ad execs were famed for their ability to make consumers desire products.

Fast-forward a few decades. Now, the internet is today's sandbox for advertising. With millions of users performing billions of searches every day, the web is the best place to attract the right set of eyes to your product.

These days, ad writing isn't only limited to the copywriting offices of

Madison Avenue. Today, the ad writer could be *you*.

Writing good advertising copy requires a great deal of skill. This niche is not just for any writer. You'll be required to understand the industry (which involves a lot of research, if it isn't second nature to you) and the people you're writing for. Ad writing is heavily dependent on understanding marketing and your target audience—just like social media. It's not marketing in the traditional sense; you won't find a use for deciphering supply-demand curves or regurgitating demographic trends.

What you *will* understand is how people *think*, and how you can use that to create a *desire*.

The more you become involved in writing ad copy, the more you'll start to appreciate the subtle nuances of human nature. After a while, you'll start to know, at a glance, what will work and what won't. You'll understand how phrasing something in a particular way will make it more desirable to your buyer than phrasing it any other way. You'll learn how ad copy fits into the grand scheme of things and what it provides to an overall content and branding strategy for the businesses you serve—or your own.

Although it is a complex field to master, it's a relatively easy field to get into. You already have personal experience in being faced with ads on a daily basis. It's just a matter of condensing the information you get from various companies, and figuring out how they do what they do.

Again, the most important facet of this type of writing is in *understanding your audience*. Knowing how to engage with the target audience is a necessity for writing great advertisement copy.

Ad writers need to juggle psychology, marketing, and potentially humor in developing the perfect ad.

How Online Storytelling Has Become the New Way to Sell

Good ad writing focuses on the psychology of desire. That's usually why

people earning degrees in marketing have to take so many courses in human psychology: it's because crafting ads requires an understanding of human nature.

This works to a writer's advantage, because few people intuitively understand the human condition better than someone who successfully writes copy for a living. However, you'll realize that ad copy is a lot more involved than it first seems, and you are likely to learn a lot more about human nature and psychological habits than you originally bargained for. Advertising writing requires you to promote and extol the benefits of a product in a way that makes the viewer, reader, or user want to buy it.

In the 20th century, this seemed easy enough. It didn't take a whole lot of writing skill to note the things that made a product beneficial to the consumer in such a way that the consumer would be encouraged to purchase it.

However, in the new millennium of the 21st century, we're serving a beast of an entirely different color.

*In this day and age, the aim is to sell to your reader...
without selling to your reader.*

It sounds like a contradiction, but it's 100% true. Today's intelligent, tech-savvy consumer does not want to be sold *to*. Instead, they'll seek out what is relevant to them, and engage directly with the brand that answers their questions and solves their problems the best, or whom they simply *like* and relate to the most.

Here are some stats to back up this statement. A reported 86% of people skip over TV ads.⁹ (And that was in 2014; that number is probably continuing to grow quite a bit. I've joined the group of people who have cut cable and switched entirely to Amazon Prime and Netflix. No more interruptive advertising!) Ninety-one percent of people unsubscribe from company emails;¹⁰ and most buyers will go through an entire 57% of the sales process without talking to a sales rep.¹¹

In contrast, 70% of people would rather learn about a company through informative articles than an ad; 60% of people are inspired to seek out a product after reading about it; and a whopping 80% of people appreciate learning about a company through online content.¹²

The crazy part is that this “warm” type of marketing (inbound, content marketing) costs nearly \$14 *less* per customer than outbound marketing.¹³

Today’s generation is a smart one, comfortable with technology and the internet. They can sniff out a cold sell faster than the speed of sound, and they will run in the opposite direction.

Be honest—how many of you would let a salesman in your door, if you didn’t know him or had never heard of his product before?

You’re not going to sell a lot of things to people if you plan to only write sales pitches.

Good ad writing of today incorporates a new, yet classically old, tactic: *storytelling*.

Sound familiar? Think back to our section on Poo~Pourri, in Chapter I, Starting Grounds, *An Example of Storytelling Success in Marketing: Poo~Pourri*.

Here’s why ad copy involves good storytelling skills.

The storyteller has long been the kind of person that entire villages respected. These raconteurs delivered stories that told of glory, of courage, of honor; stories that made the reader, or audience, feel as though *they* were the heroes experiencing cataclysmic struggles, that *they* were right there in the midst of the action. That’s what brilliant sales writers of today try to do. In the case of our toy store example, we could create an advertisement based on the toy store as a place of “escape.” We could sell the idea of wonderment to children and the idea of fun to adults, without actually just selling wonder or fun, but in fact potentially our merchandise. We could also sell “nostalgia,” giving the parents a warm sense of memory back to their own childhood.

Let's say that at Krazy Kids, you're creating an ad for an upcoming, all-day, play event to raise funds for an expansion. This will be a sponsored ad on Facebook to demographics of probable parents in your location.

Our advertisement could read something like:

"You're only young once. Give your kid an experience at Krazy Kids Toys' All-Day Play Event on September 28. {Insert description of event/FREE items, food, etc.}"

In this ad, we've tied in our event mention to the parents' nostalgia, reminding them that this is the moment to give their kids a time and a place to play, because their children won't be young forever. Event details are the next priority to attract interested parties, and giving something away for "free" almost always is a great attraction, especially for a business like ours, as well as focusing on "healthy" (organic, whole) foods when you buy food or drink to share with this audience, which is made up of parents most likely interested in good food to feed their children. You could say something like, "All-day fun and play, imagination-building toys for every age level, FREE Oreos and organic whole milk served from noon-5 p.m. \$X per person."

A final test for your ad copy—would YOU go to your event? If not, what would you change, or tailor to better pique your own interests?

As for me, I wouldn't mind spending my day off having fun at a toyshop, watching my little girl play to her heart's content. And, free Oreos with organic milk? Yes, I will most certainly plan to see you at Krazy Kids, on September 28.

Now, let's take that a step further.

Focus on the nostalgia for a moment. We could build a campaign founded on passing down your favorite retro toys or hobbies to your kids, providing parents and children a bonding experience. We'll find and add the right retro toys to our store, and build on this nostalgia to bring joy and wonder to both generations. With the right amount of copy, visuals and sponsored ads, using the powerful draw of emotions and at least some of the positive

memories all of us bring from childhood, it's likely our store will see an upsurge in sales from people wanting to explore their childhood vicariously through their kids.

Brands are picking up on the power of storytelling. I've personally spotted an increase of ads written in storytelling style. There's a billboard for a credit union that I pass all the time on the highway: in classic "Olde English" font, it uses phrases like "*We aren't the Big Bad Wolf of the story.*" And, "*Plan ahead for your princess' future.*" Cute, fun, and it certainly caught my attention.

Or, on Facebook: an ad with a picture of a typical Joe, sitting at his desk in an office, but raising his hands and looking excited about something on the computer. Copy reads: "What did Joe just find out that boosted his management production by 125%?" I identified with the character when I saw the ad, and clicked on it.

Our toy store, Krazy Kids, is a perfect example of what storytelling can look like.

Do you really feel like you could be in the owner's shoes now?

Good. Throughout this entire chapter, I've been using Krazy Kids as an easy-to-understand company that can serve in the position of a potential client (or your shoes, if you're a business owner learning content creation). Using Krazy Kids as a common thread throughout the chapter and referencing it often is just another aspect of storytelling. It puts us in the position of being able to almost visualize this toy store before we've even entered its doors.

Storytelling takes a theme and spreads it through an advertisement or a campaign, so that it becomes recognizable, and memorable. The best stories pass into popular culture, and are forever immortalized.

Application: 6 Fundamental Steps to Writing Advertising Copy

To summarize:

1. Know your target demographic and your ideal customer.
2. Figure out the pain points, triggers, or factors that make your product desirable to your audience.
3. Work out the most efficient way of making the audience aware of your product, and what benefits it can provide to them—without sounding as if it's a cold sell.
4. Develop ad copy that is effective and emotionally appealing to the audience.
5. Test this ad copy on a sample of ideal consumers to see how they respond to it.
6. Change the ad, if necessary, to be more effective, and retest it until the target demographic finds it acceptable. (On a larger scale, this can be done using focus groups.)

5. Industry Writing



First, let me start by defining industry writing.

Industry writing uses an expert point of view to create content that is necessary for a high-level audience. An expert author creates this type of premium content for a matching niche in which they have true, real-life

experience. In other words, not just any writer can create this content: only an expert in that industry can.

Industry writing is how online businesses can obtain “thought leadership” content: the content that their matching audience will not only read and understand, but also respect, share to all their followers, and talk about—so much so that readers begin to regard that publisher as a “thought leader” in their niche.

Thought leadership content is the type of online content that brands should be publishing more of. It's going to be this content that is in demand as time goes on, too.

For this exact type of content, an industry writer is a double whammy for content success: the business receives the benefit of a writer who is both a) a skilled copywriter and b) someone who has hands-on, real experience in their niche.

As you probably have guessed by now, this type of writing requires a specialized writer. Unless you're prepared to do a lot of work and in-depth research, and unless you're willing to spend a great deal of time attempting to understand an industry you're unfamiliar with, I would say that you should limit your time here, and turn your writing talents elsewhere.

Here's the one tip that will help you home in on what you're good at, and prevent you from wasting your time trying to write “expert copy” for every kind of industry.

Only write expert content for an industry you're passionate about and in which you have real-life expertise.

For example, I have no interest in (ever) writing technical content. I'll leave that up to the talented tech writers I've hired for our team. They've previously worked in IT departments. We can send all of our technical writing orders to them, and know that the content is in expert, capable hands.

If I tried to write this kind of content, it would take me hours, eat up all my energy, and drain me completely—what’s more, the client probably wouldn’t even like my final product, or they’d bury me with revisions trying to get what they really wanted in the first place.

But I *love* to write about content writing and marketing, and I feel pretty confident by now about writing in these areas with intelligence and knowledge, after five years of working in this area as a career, researching and writing extensively and continually on these topics for numerous blog channels, starting a Twitter chat that has hit #42 on Twitter, a podcast that hit New & Noteworthy in Business News on iTunes within two days of publishing, and starting a seven-figure company with no outside investment.

Industry Writers Get Paid More

Here’s one thing to know about the industry content writing market: those working in these “industry” fields, such as technical writers, are commonly paid a lot more because of the level of required research, specialized knowledge, and expertise involved. This is true of any industry writing.

Simply put, know that you can charge higher rates if you are a writer with a proven specialty in an industry.

For example, if you’ve worked in software for 10 years, you can charge easily five times more per page for IT copy than what you’d charge for something more general (writing a piece about pets or furniture). Or, let’s say you have a Bachelor’s in teaching; you can call yourself an expert in education, and charge more for that category of writing. If you have a culinary degree or are a chef, you can feature that on your profile—and a foodie blog will certainly pay more to have a chef copywriter writing their content.

The same goes for any business that needs online content. If at all possible, they should be looking for an industry expert to write their content.

As I described, because of the thought leadership status needed in order to rise above the sea of noisy content production, industry expert writing is a hugely growing need online.

Many businesses absolutely need these expert voices in order to reach their audience correctly. An average blog writer won't fit the scope for, let's say, a medical or health-related article, or a specific health and fitness blog. They need a matching industry-knowledgeable writer. And if a matching industry expert is writing that brand's industry content, readers will trust that brand a lot more.

So, as a writer, bring your industry skills to the table. What have you done in the past? Have you managed a retail store? You have expertise in business and retail. Definitely consider your degrees. Each of the fields you graduated in can be your expert areas, too. Did you take any extra-curricular coursework, or volunteer in any projects that qualify you to write about another field? Stick to what you know, but go ahead and sell your skills and industry know-how. Just don't waste your time or energy on industries you know very little about.

The Art of Industry Writing

We've just discussed how creating industry content requires a writer to know what he or she is talking about. Now, let's delve into actually creating industry-level content, once you've established where your industry expertise lies.

Let's say that we expand Krazy Kids and bring in a natural kids' health herb supplements line, ranging from digestive health to probiotics and cold tablets.

To promote our new line, we need content that speaks with insider knowledge about the natural health industry and this herbal brand in particular. We need an expert health and wellness writer, specifically in natural and holistic/herbal health, in order to write knowledgeable blogs and

press releases. This content needs to be well respected by readers in order for them to believe the claims these products make.

This is one example of utilizing industry writers in order to create content worthy of your brand and obtain a thought leadership spot. In other industries, these expert writers can be used to write even more in-depth content, such as technical software manuals, or ebooks for niche industries, ranging from legal to medical.

Industry writing requires astute dedication to factual data and research, and, simply put, a knowledgeable voice. This is why expert writers are highly recommended for matching high-level industries. A copywriter who has also worked in software and IT development for 10+ years, for example, will just naturally know the lingo he or she should be using in content that will attract this matching audience. So, industry writers need to understand the field they are writing for competently enough so that they can deliver balanced, real content for that industry's business.

Always leave industry content to a matching premium industry writer.

Application: 5 Key Steps for the Industry Writer

To summarize:

1. Gather the data you need, and using your expert knowledge in that field, interpret the data into the right conversational lingo and wording that the audience will understand.
2. Consult the client on your interpretation. If their interpretation is in any way different, ask them to explain their reasoning, and try another approach.
3. Develop the content, spending time on verifiable research, and make sure you claim only factually correct information. Utilize SEO if the industry content being written is going to be published on the web.
4. Submit your content to the client for review.

5. Make any changes suggested by the client, and re-submit your work.

6. Journalism



Probably one of the most common requests for journalistic writing is the *online press release*.

Modern online news distribution channels have made it possible for businesses of all sizes to reach big online networks like the *NY Times*, *Reuters*, etc., with well-written press releases. In essence, an online press release is usually a 400-word news story, optimized with keywords and a newsy headline, with proper and accurate research completed, and written with a good news tone.

The best writer for this type of work is a journalist—someone who has the correct skills and is actually trained in writing news.

The average writer will not know how to craft a true news story (press release) in a way that's publication-ready for press release distribution channels. And this is necessary, because Google is developing stricter standards for quality press releases.

In our content agency, I've left press release creation up to our journalists only, and I'd recommend this approach for best results.

The Keys of Journalistic Writing

Back to our store, Krazy Kids.

They have a new line of toys coming out, and they need a good press release writer to develop a press release that will go in their blog and social media accounts. It will also be distributed through a good online news distribution channel. So, they need someone with skills in journalistic writing to report on the new products with a balanced, well-written, and factual news-style voice.

Online journalistic writing can range from press releases to published interviews. For accuracy and the best results, I highly recommend leaving this field to an actual journalist. Now, I've written successful press releases in my freelance writing days. But I was only able to do so by accurately mimicking the true press release style—and it took me months of writing online content before I was comfortable taking on a press release. Overall, from the internal hiring processes in my company, which have included hiring hundreds of writers and dozens of journalists, I've seen a definite trend towards journalists creating the most successful press releases.

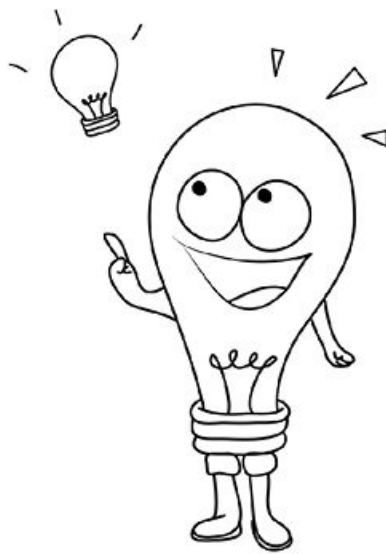
Besides the fundamental skill of journalism for a press release, there is also the necessary, yet trainable, caveat of online writing skills and SEO. The online press release writer will have to write catchy headlines that gain the press release, and subsequently the client, a lot of views and, in turn, a lot of shares. They'll also have to optimize SEO keywords throughout the press release (naturally, of course) and place a few relevant links back to the company that is sponsoring (putting out) the press release, in the body text. The keywords used within a press release are usually relatable to the new product or service that is being launched or announced.

Application: 2 Steps for Journalistic Writing

To summarize:

1. Be a trained journalist or hire one to provide content for your online press release needs.
2. Incorporate the elements of online content writing; SEO keywords for the new product or service should be in the title and the text, 2-3 links to the product, links to the client's site, and even links to social media should be included. Be sure to create a good, optimized news-style headline.

7. Creative Writing



If you search on any freelancer site for writing jobs, you'll see hundreds of possibilities.

Many open jobs will be for your average web page or blog, but there will be some unique requests. I like to call this the “creative” category.

These are your scripts, fictional pieces, and more. For example, my team once wrote the Q&As for a card game. Another company needed a creative, 50-word mobile app description from us. These unique writing requests can

vary from job to job, but they are usually quite flexible in their method of execution.

Application: Creative Writing Can Be the Easiest Genre

As a natural-born writer, out of the seven types of online writing, creative writing will likely come easiest to you.

That's because creative writing typically has very few limitations, and you're free to do just that—*be creative*—while you write.

The key to these types of jobs is to understand what the person who hired you is looking for. Because the final products differ depending on the job, having an idea of what your final deliverable will look like is really important. Being in constant communication with your client is also a good idea, because your questions will be answered quickly and by the best source. The more “out-there” the request, the more likely it is that you'll have a lot of questions about how to proceed.

I've found this unique category of online writing to be a lot of fun, and these creative pieces are also a great exercise for your talents, if you've written online content before. My sole tip is this: don't choose a job request from this category as your *first* project, unless it's a script and you happen to have a degree or experience in film and TV. Instead, grab these projects occasionally once you've been writing for a while. Go for anything that looks fun to you in this category. If you think it looks fun, and you feel you'll enjoy creating it, most likely, you'll be good at it!

Chapter Conclusion: You're A Creative Jack-of-all-Trades

You'll more than likely encounter every type of writing I mentioned above in your work as an online writer, especially if you plan to make online writing a regular gig. And these broad categories are by no means exhaustive.

I know there are unique jobs out there that would fit into a miscellaneous

section easily enough, but it would be impossible to tell you about all the things that *could* come your way as a writer. Really.

This is why I've come to think of the online writer as a jack-of-all-trades. We just work with our hands in a different way: we *write* for all trades.

A good writer is a chameleon in the creative sense.

All in all, the lion's share of freelance writing work online comes from people looking for web content writers, bloggers, and ghostwriters—so hone your skills in these areas thoroughly.

Your first “job” as an aspiring online writer is to simply *practice* and learn. Read about copywriting and follow a few top blogs. Get started on practicing your headline skills. Download a couple of PDF lists for headline verbs and phrases (see my Appendix), and write a bunch of sample headlines using those resources. Get used to creating lots of content—headlines, subheaders, and topics—and *never stop* refining and sharpening your content skills.

Remember that practice will perfect, and grow, your trade. And remember to be adaptive to all the content types as you write.

As an online writer, *genuine writing creativity* at your base will make you strong enough to handle almost any job within your expertise.

Because you're a writer, that already means you're naturally creative—and flexible. Creativity at your core is going to spark a lot of talent from you. To the natural writer reading my book, *congratulations* on holding this creative core. You're an awesome being.

Ready? Let's learn how to market your newfound skills!

V.

Getting Started Making Money & Marketing Yourself as a Copywriter



We've covered how to use SEO in your writing and what kinds of online content you'll create.

Congratulations! You've made it through the toughest part.

Next comes the fun part: how to market yourself, make your name online as a writer, and start earning income. Ready?

I'm going to break down how to market yourself into several key steps.

Marketing Yourself, Step 1: Freelancer Platforms & Craigslist

If you have some income you can invest and some writing experience, and you want to start with your own brand and a website, skip ahead right now to step 2.

For those who are feeling brand new to online writing (like me, in 2011), freelancer platforms and Craigslist will provide you with immediate opportunities and learning grounds, where you can simultaneously earn your first writing income and build some experience.

Your first step here is to make sure your résumé is up to date and that you have some really good writing samples. Your résumé should reflect all the training and coursework you've had in college or university, any degree(s) you have, and all of your past and current work positions.

If you don't have writing samples, create some. Work on these samples like they're your *best* work. Come up with great headlines, write unique copy, and incorporate SEO when you create your samples, so you can showcase all of your writing skills to a future employer.

Now that you have a résumé and good content samples, here are a few easy ways to get started looking for immediate work.

1. Create a Freelancer Profile on Upwork

Elance and oDesk, where I started out acquiring my first paid writing gigs, were both recently combined and rebranded as Upwork. Today, it's the world's largest online workplace, where freelancers can create profiles and employers can post jobs. All kinds of employers and freelancers can be found here, from design and multimedia professionals to virtual assistants and copywriters. There are hundreds of writing jobs posted here, just waiting for a good writer. To hire, employers deposit funds into escrow held by the site, which is released after the work is completed and approved. Upwork is a decent starting place, because it's relatively easy to get work here. Also, they've amassed quite a library of writing tests you can take (and retake until you pass) that "certify" you for different writing categories: for example, you can be a certified "British" writer by taking the

test in that vertical. And the higher you score in, say, the U.S. Spelling & Grammar test, the better you appear in those skills when applying for a job.

Other freelance platforms exist that are similar to Upwork, like Freelancer and Guru. However, after paying for memberships and working hard to get profiles on these and other freelance sites, I found that most of them weren't worth it. I'd recommend that you focus on the largest one, Upwork. If you want to branch out beyond Upwork, do your own research and make sure you don't sign up to anything that's a scam (some of these platforms are less than desirable).

A couple of notes about the freelance platforms that are worth mentioning here:

A) Get ready for the atrocious, and stay away from it. Because of the bidding wars and many novice writers that you'll find on Upwork and similar sites, a lot of the work is heavily underpaid. Expect to see really low-paying jobs—but never (and I mean never) lower your standards to accept those. You might see someone trying to pay a mere couple of dollars for original articles. It's truly a shame, and thankfully, employers like these are significantly decreasing in number, as the value and necessity of good content marketing is increasing.

A rule of thumb: you contribute to the growth of low-paying content jobs if you accept them; you contribute to them going away if you don't. It's fine to take lower-paying jobs, especially if you want to trade your work for good feedback and a review of your skills to boost your new reputation. But, don't ever, ever accept original content requests that are paying just a few dollars, no matter how desperate you are. It hurts the entire industry.

B) As a writer who began on Upwork (when it was Elance and oDesk), I know it takes a bit of hustle before you'll be considered for lucrative jobs. On Elance back in the day, I was sending in 20 job bids *per day* to score just 5-8 new jobs a week. But the best opportunities for me occurred *after* the first job was done successfully. Clients who have

hired you as a writer and are pleased with your work can invite you to bid on private, reoccurring jobs that are only seen by you—no bidding wars, just instant work. This is where the real magic happens, because at this point in time, you're no longer competing against others and can begin to earn a stable income. I say "stable," but keep in mind that many of these jobs have an end date unless you are hired by a larger content writing agency.

C) Beware the vicious cycle. Freelance sites for the online writer do a poor job of turning amateurs into professionals. Now, learning to write professionally is partly a result of the writing opportunities you get, and partly a result of how you grasp those opportunities and produce a level of work that is remarkably better than the rest. That is what sets you apart in your field.

But therein lies the problem.

The reason Upwork and other sites like it thrive is because they offer companies a cheap alternative to outsourcing. While a professional sales copywriter can charge a company thousands of dollars a week for direct, contracted work, you can get this work done via Freelancer for, say, several hundred bucks or less. The thing is, the quality of work the company usually receives in return is actually *worth* those few bucks. These sites are built on the idea that in order for you to qualify for a job, you will need to do your best, but you won't be paid very well for doing your best.

It's a sad state of affairs to see talented, aspiring professionals get ground out and quit the industry—because it simply stopped making sense for them to put their best work out there and be offered almost nothing for it. Granted, there are some professionals who have "made it" on Upwork, but those stories are the exception to the rule. Although these starter sites are great places to begin learning your craft, eventually there will come a point where it no longer makes sense to use these sites

anymore, because the quality of the work you produce compared to how much you are paid for it is simply too disproportionate.

So remember, as your skill set grows, the pay *won't* grow on these freelance platforms, and oftentimes you'll be paid far less than you're worth. There are a few good employers hanging around on Upwork, who might be willing to pay you close to \$40 a page. But they are very rare. And even if you get around \$20 a page, that's a good income if you're offered consistent work, which doesn't always happen, despite promises.

Have the mindset that you'll "outgrow" these platforms, and begin to find well-paid, longer-term jobs outside them. Another reason to avoid using these platforms long term is that they always have a middleman, and no matter how good the pay is, the platform takes a fee for themselves out of every single payment you receive.

2. Job Search on Craigslist, in the Gigs > Writing Area

A word before you start here. Beware of scams. There are many legitimate companies posting here, but there are also scams. The quickest way to weed these out is if you're asked to provide content before you receive payment. This usually comes in the first message or two after you've sent in a response to a writing gig. Never write without a funded escrow setup or payment upfront for individual writing jobs.

However, the pot of gold with Craigslist is that if you find the *right* gigs, you get the opportunity of building independent long-term, direct relationships with potential clients.

This is where I found the majority of my clients in my first year of business and where I found some of my best first writing jobs. Today, I find very few clients on Craigslist, because we have so many clients coming in as warm leads organically through our content ranking highly in Google.

Also, a secret to Craigslist's writing gigs is that you must be an individual, not a company, in most cases. This means it's perfect for you!

You'll be able to directly email and/or call the clients, which is great for a long-term relationship, if things work out. And, no middleman fees. I'd start with your city, unless you're in the sticks where no one really needs a copywriter; in that case, search top cities, such as seattle.craigslist.org, or chicago.craigslist.org, to name a few. Many Craigslist employers won't mind hiring remote writers, as long as you can write well and produce what they're looking for. (Check my Appendix for a list of top cities where copywriting jobs are popular.) Sort through the listed gigs and email the employers you like, following their instructions to a T on what materials they need from you, such as your résumé, writing samples, or published links.

Craigslist was where I met some of my favorite first clients. I used to write for a textile manufacturer, and I had weekly calls with the co-founder, who mailed me checks weeks in advance. I thoroughly enjoyed our sessions brainstorming his next set of 40-50 optimized landing pages together. Another client was a busy dog-sitting company in Florida, who was so impressed with my writing that he sent my name to his webmaster, who sent me a bunch of new work. I was able to build solid relationships with Craigslist leads, and I found amazing businesses to work with. I had consistent calls with them, and I enjoyed guiding them on good SEO content practices and teaching them how to blog. Jobs with "web content" in the gig headline were my favorite ones to pick up.

Keep in mind that with Craigslist, you may have to reach out to a lot of gig posters before you're selected for one, especially if you have less experience than more qualified applicants. I was sending nearly 100 emails per day back in the first days of my heavy work grind, when I spent 10 to 12 hours a day just working on finding jobs.

When applying to actual Craigslist jobs, one tactic that worked very well for me was to be personal, well-worded in my email (of course), and also, to repeat *exactly* what they were looking for back to them as specifically as possible, with mention of your experience in their industry or topic. This

assured them that I understood their request. For example: “I’m a writer who’s passionate about dogs; I would love to write your requested blog guides tailored to the type of people that would walk into your grooming shop! I’ll spend time on accurate research, fulfill the requested 1,500 words per guide, etc. {Put in all the specifics here of what they mention they want in the content.} I have prior expertise writing about the specific Pomeranian breed. Attached are some samples.” It’s as simple as describing *exactly* what they are asking for right back to them, and confidently letting them know you can do it.

I’d even go as far as to say that Craigslist is an overlooked place to find great jobs in the creative category. Agencies that need logos, the odd consumer who needs visuals created or content transcribed, or a small-to-medium sized business that’s looking for an ongoing creative provider; these types of clients, and many more in-between, hang out right here on Craigslist.

3. Get Hired with a Writing Agency

As a new writer in 2011, I saw and applied to many writing agencies but was always somehow declined when I applied to them. (I’m now grateful, because it gave me an open path to create my own writing agency.) One of my biggest worries in my first year of freelance writing was how to get stable income: and being hired by a writing agency would most definitely have given me peace of mind. A writing agency is a great umbrella to stay under if you’re in need of regular writing income. You won’t have to always be on the hunt for your next bread-and-butter freelance writing job and can simply take as many writing assignments as you can handle, working with a writing agency.

There are many writing agencies out there; you can simply Google “copywriting agency” and follow the application instructions to those who are reputable firms. Look for companies that are transparent on their rates and method of as well as time of payment. It may not be disclosed on their

main web pages, but they should disclose it in their job listings or privately upon request.

My writing agency, Express Writers, hires several dozen new writers and a few editors every single month; as our demand increases, we put out new jobs and field for new writers. Our entrance testing is rigorous and includes a proctored test I've created on SEO writing as well as a real content writing test order. We've structured regular bi-weekly pay periods on PayPal, and pay experts vs. general writers different rates. Some of our best writers have been with us for over three years. I've even seen some gifted writers leave their full-time jobs to become full-time writers on our team. We now have a manager in charge of human resources at our agency. (I've put the details of how to get in touch with our HR department in the Appendix.)

Tip: How to Pick Up Quick Pro Writing Experience

Many Craigslist jobs (which pay well and are offered by great companies) require some professional writing experience. If you want to apply, but you have no portfolio experience at all, here's a quick way to pick some up: do some volunteer writing for local charities in your area.

These "jobs" are easy to get right away—all you have to do is approach and ask your charity of choice if they need written content—and, it's a great way to exercise and grow your expertise while helping others. You'll also build references in this way. For example, I've written web content and press releases for a few churches I've attended. When you've written their content successfully, ask for a written testimonial or review for your site or portfolio.

In conclusion, on this first step, remember that these types of writing gigs are meant for those who are new to online writing and who want to get their feet wet and earn their first paycheck. This is also a great way to gain your first paid writing experience. When you start off on places like Upwork, you might be paid less than you're actually worth, but as you continue to

hone your skills, the real payoff can come from the skills you grow in as you complete these early writing jobs. Don't forget: always request detailed feedback on your jobs. It's really good to get an in-depth analysis of what you did, whether it's right or wrong, so you know how to improve. Learning what works and what doesn't is a long, ongoing process, and feedback is the key.

As an online writer aiming to produce content that fits Google's standards, be ready to adapt in order to stay relevant—or risk losing out on jobs. A great way to maintain your knowledge of how to write online content is by following and reading content published by experts in leading online marketing/SEO blog community sites. This will help you to always stay ahead of the curve and remain current, so that you know what works best to create a connection with your audience and rank in Google. I've listed some recommended blogs to follow in the Appendix.

Marketing Yourself, Step 2: Create Your Brand & Write for Yourself!

I can't say strongly enough, that as you start delving into selling your writing, remember to *practice, practice, practice* your writing skills.

And this actually ties into the act of selling yourself.

How?

Content marketing is replacing the old way of advertising. That means that we, as content writers, have a great opportunity here—to sell ourselves through our own content. The more *you* blog, practice writing for yourself, and post your content, the more you'll build organic traffic avenues to your own site and services through your written content.

This step will require some time and investment, but it's necessary. If you don't have the money, stay on step 1 for a while and earn some savings. Apply for gigs daily until you have some jobs on freelance sites and have been hired for solid Craigslist writing gigs. Then you can save enough cash in your pocket to invest in your brand.

Your start-up investment costs as a writer can vary, depending on your skillset and what work you might need to contract out (like hiring someone to design and build your site). I started with a personal investment of \$75, because I coded my own website (I taught myself the basics of HTML, how to use an FTP server, and all the fundamentals of creating site pages). So all I had to do was buy a website theme and template, register my domain, buy monthly hosting, and file my business name and LLC.

It's time to go create your brand, develop a website, write all your content, and go live!

Be sure to invest in an expert small business accountant or attorney to guide you on correct business filing practices. If you don't want to run a business, I suggest making your brand simply your own name. But, you might prefer a clever statement as your online writing brand. Check with your accountant or attorney for advice.

Whether you're Jane Doe Copywriter, Inc., or Subliminal Messages, LLC, it's time to build a WordPress website, find a good host, write all your pages, and create a blog. Don't forget to avidly proofread everything—the last thing you want is a misspelling anywhere! Ask a friend who has a good eye for spelling, or hire a professional editor, and make sure your content undergoes an outsider's review before you go live. It's easy to not catch mistakes in our own writing, when we are two inches away from the words. (Trust me: I've had over 20 people involved in the review of this book!)

Write blogs that sell yourself and your writing skills. Be consistent with your blogs. For your blog topics, go back to our SEO research chapter for help, and choose your best-fit keywords. Remember your industry experience (i.e., culinary copywriter in {location})—these combined long-tail keywords for your writing skills and niche could provide instant opportunities to rank.

To continue writing good blogs, ask yourself what do you like to talk about? Write a few blogs that showcase your passion or niche expertise.

Write an intro blog about who you are, and then rewrite it to make a unique “About” page for your site.

Before you start on real content orders, practice—on content for your own brand.

As a writer, you need to market yourself, and the best way to do that is—you guessed it—through creating your own exceptional content. Using your keywords, consistently blog and stick to a schedule; create content for yourself, even if you are planning to work for outside clients and fill future content orders. This is what I did in my early days, and it really helped me start securing an online reputation as a writer. This will help you create a portfolio of examples of your writing style, too, as well as boost your name and rankings in Google. How hard you work here can distinguish what sets you apart from the rest of the freelance writers out there.

Guest Blogging: Or, When Not to Demand a Writing Paycheck

I can’t let our “writing-for-yourself” section end without a word on guest blogging.

One huge asset, which has been gigantic for me personally, is the opportunity of guest posting your authored content on high-traffic, high-ranking blogs. This is a common marketing path that many bloggers use in order to increase awareness of their presence across their chosen niche audience.

However, this is one time you *won’t* ask for a paycheck for your direct written work. So, don’t expect a direct payment today; but guest blogging could mean huge amounts of reputation building and even a stream of clients in the long run.

So, it’s more than worth the “free” content you start out writing as a guest blogger.

The process is pretty simple, but it requires patience if you’re new to it. You need to be a blogger yourself first, so you can offer some samples of your writing to the guest blog you want to write for. You also need to find a

topic or niche that you love writing about. For me, it's SEO and online content marketing. So I've pitched to and been accepted as a guest blogger on Content Marketing Institute, Search Engine Journal, Social Media Examiner, ProBlogger, Kissmetrics, SEMrush, Social Media Today, and Site Pro News, to name a few. To find yours, just look up a blog that matches your topic of interest (Google your niche + blog). Make sure the blogs you pitch are high-quality, and that they attribute guest authors properly. For instance, if you don't see guest authors or any author names at all, skip over that blog. If you see a lot of author names with bios on posts, that blog is properly attributing. (It's important to have your writing and expertise acknowledged.) Then, see if they accept guest bloggers, and try to find their submission guidelines. (If you aren't certain, send them a contact form.) Follow their guest blogging guidelines to a "T," and pitch them some topics and summaries. If you don't hear back, keep pitching every few weeks, and try other sites. I've even directly tweeted the site when I didn't hear anything via email, and received a Twitter reply.

The effort you make in guest blogging is to write a free piece of content and give up all rights to your piece to that blog channel. It can be a big effort, especially at first if you have no name online, and it can take a lot of time, learning how to find and pitch to the right blogs. The exposure? *Huge*, for your brand and your name, if you pick the right channels.

For example, two channels I guest blog for are Search Engine Journal, weekly, and Site Pro News, twice weekly. My blogs are usually more than 1,000 words for each channel, on an ongoing basis. I've seen conversions of over \$5,000 from just two readers who came to our site and purchased content after reading a couple of guest blogs on those two channels alone. It's a good chunk of change in exchange for writing some "free" content. If you guest blog smart, it can be huge. The social media company Buffer generated 100 signups a day from one of their list-style guest posts.¹

Now, marketing yourself through content isn't just limited to *writing*.

If you have anything of an appealing personality (and as a creative writer,

I bet you do), and you aren't afraid to step out and sell *yourself* (which you'll need to do anyway as a copywriter-for-hire), there are some fantastic new platforms on the rise, offering incredible opportunities to market yourself. And, best of all, they're *free*. I've used them myself, and I'm about to share some insider tactics.

Ready?

Marketing Yourself, Final Step: Gaining a Presence on Popular Channels

I call these *popular* because right now, they are trending quite a bit. These are the “hot” channels to be on today. They haven't been around that long. Some, longer than others. The past six months I've seen the awareness, engagement, and activity of just about every one of these channels rise significantly.

1. Live Video Streaming

Live video streaming is hotter than ever today with the rise of tools that are completely free and open to all users, including Periscope, Blab, and Facebook Live. With the amount of users growing on these platforms, it's safe to say that live video streaming is headed towards being a main channel of connectivity and engagement in the future.

You might be wondering—why the heck does Julia want me to go on live video?

How does that tie into you as a writer earning money and making a name for yourself?

I'll tell you. Live video streaming, specifically with the launch of Blab, Periscope and Facebook Live, is almost as good as paying hundreds of dollars to get into a high-ticket marketing event. (Note, I said almost: nothing can quite replace real, face-to-face connections.) Not only do you get to watch and gain free insights and knowledge shared by leaders in content marketing, SEO, blogging, and more—but you also get to

participate! This means big exposure for you among leading agencies and influencers! They get to learn about you, as you learn from them. How incredibly awesome is that?

So, how do you go about live video streaming?

My first word of advice here is to stay on top of your research. The best tool for live streaming next year might not be the same tool that is hot this year. The best example for this is that there's a battle being played out now between Facebook Live and Periscope.² Twitter owns Periscope, so it has major backing; but there's been issues with the app, from the app itself freezing during usage to users reporting sexual harassment, which seems to be tied to the location being left "on" when you record—anyone can join just from coming across your live stream, unless you hit "off" on location sharing.³

Facebook Live officially became available to all users in early April 2016. If you have a Facebook, you can now live stream! It was a major move to compete with Periscope. I've joined several live streams, including Gary Vaynerchuk's, and have been pleasantly surprised by its ease of use: how little the video bogged my Android phone down, and how simple it was to engage with the influencers who were live streaming. I've also seen a lot of Facebook Live happening in the Facebook groups that I'm in. It's a great way to engage on Facebook! Also, Snapchat is a hot platform that recently launched video chat; if your audience is there, you should definitely have a presence there.

So, in short, stay updated on the best channels for live streaming and keep researching as you use them. A good way to do this is to follow influencers who are the guinea pigs of "testing out" out new social platforms. Brian Fanzo of iSocialFanz is a noted social media influencer who does this and has given accurate portrayals, predictions, and advice about new platforms.

Now, let me discuss exactly how live streaming has helped me gain exposure as a writer. I'll give you two examples.

In this first example, I found an opportunity through Periscope. I started

using this platform in late 2015; I downloaded the app, and followed people who shared my interests or were leading influencers in my space. Most of my time spent using Periscope was actually just in watching and joining “scopes,” or live streams, of some really awesome people in my industry. I stumbled across a crazy good opportunity doing just that. One of my favorite blogging influencers is Darren Rowse, the creator of ProBlogger and one of the hottest bloggers in Australia.⁴ I started joining a lot of his scopes. One time, he ended one by taking questions. I typed a question in and asked him if he was accepting guest bloggers. (Remember my earlier section about the benefits of guest blogging?) He addressed me live and told me where to go on ProBlogger to send in some ideas. I did so that evening, and the next day his editor contacted me back; and I’m now published on ProBlogger. Bam! (I’d tried unsuccessfully to send him guest blog ideas just a few months earlier.)

My second example is an opportunity that came through networking on Blab. First of all, Blab is amazing. It’s browser (web) based. All you have to do is go to blab.im and sign up, and you can join any Blab that interests you, right from the home page. I’d encourage you to start by just picking your favorite Blabs and joining them, watching and engaging (talk in the comments, add to the discussion, and be valuable). Then, become a frequent member of Blabs you like that are consistently scheduled. People will start to remember you, and that’s big exposure for you. I’ve seen all kinds of business, entrepreneurial, and even content writing and marketing-related Blabs that are live at all hours of the day. There are groups of people sharing all their knowledge, for free, on video; on many Blabs, there’s even a video spot open where you can call in, once you’ve joined the chat as a participant. If you do call in, it’s an instant video presence among possible top influencers in your niche! And if you’re adding value (not just jumping in to say hi, but adding valuable thoughts to the conversation), someone is bound to look you up and ask to connect after you’ve “Blabbed” together. If

you're able to address their needs, those viewers could possibly convert into customers.

Here's just a little insight into how powerful these live video streams can be. My first time on Blab ever was when I jumped on one Friday and joined a marketing Blab with two entrepreneurial ladies. Within 10 minutes, I was part of the video call, sharing my story. They were delighted to hear my story and both scheduled follow-up calls with me next week. After our phone conversations, I was offered an opportunity to be a video chat guest on a midday show for a national female entrepreneur brand. Yeah!

2. Social Media Networking: Facebook Groups, Twitter Chats

There are a lot of things you should be doing on social media to market yourself.

First, go to Facebook and make yourself an Author/Writer public figure page. Make sure you have a professional, clear headshot to upload, and fill out all the little details. Use the same headshot to populate a profile everywhere that you don't already have one: Gravatar, Twitter, Pinterest, LinkedIn, Instagram, G+, etc.

Some platforms may work better for you than others, especially if you have specific skill sets. If you're a social media copywriter, for example, you should have a great presence on all platforms, and focus on showcasing your talents on social media, besides having a good blog. But if you sell yourself as a blogger, it's not as necessary to focus on daily Instagram updates; you should focus more on your blog activity. So, tailor your activity to where your audience resides.

Next, I'm going to discuss two social avenues that have worked very well for me, allowing me to grow in engagement and networking (meeting peers, getting great critique, and making connections with potential leads) on social media:

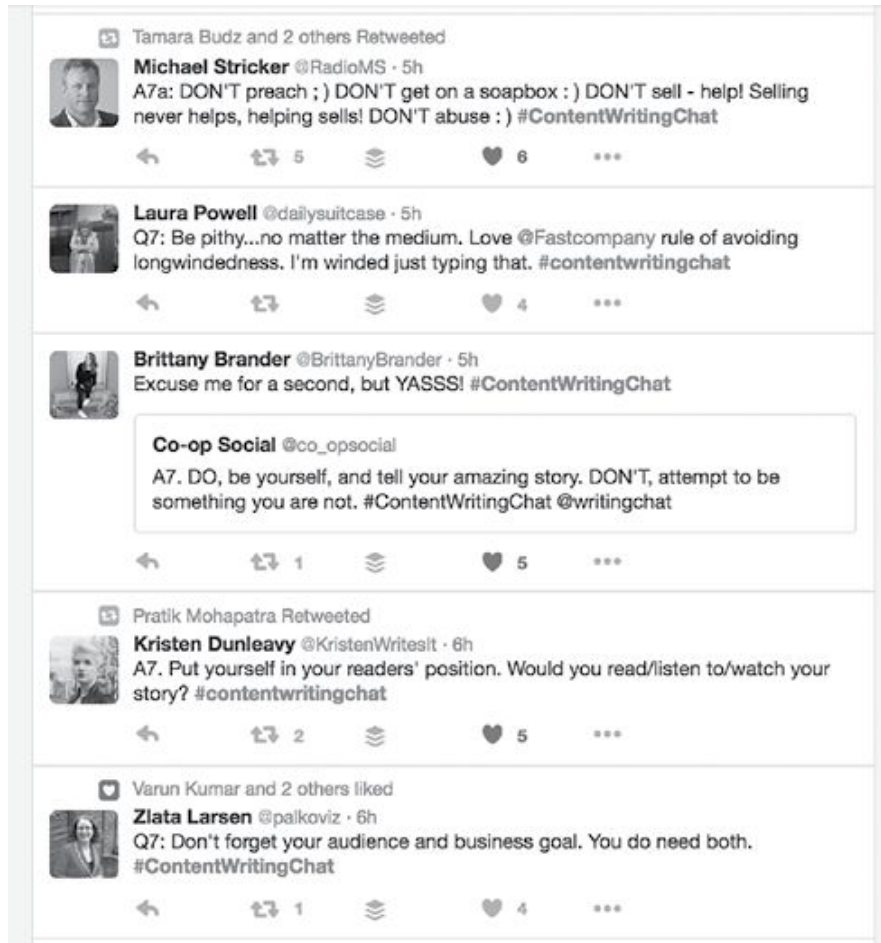
- **Twitter Chats**

- **Facebook Groups**

Twitter Chats: These are hour-long, live, public chats on Twitter, hosted by companies (or sometimes individuals), where questions are asked for the audience to answer (in tweet form). Forget “buying” a bunch of followers—Twitter chats allow you to gain new followers that are real, interested people, whom you’ve actually “met” during that Twitter chat. It’s also a great way to learn new things about marketing and skills in your niche. This is also, in my opinion, almost as good as networking at an event!

Choose a few Twitter chats that you like, and make a commitment to join those weekly. I started a Twitter chat the first week of January 2016, #ContentWritingChat. We’ve had experts like Jeff Deutsch, Guillaume Decugis, Ann Handley, and the editor of Search Engine Journal, among others, join us as the featured guest of the week sharing their thoughts live on Twitter about a particular content-focused topic. We’ve seen huge engagement rates, what’s more, people have “met” new friends during our chat, or learned a brand new skill they could take away and start using that day. Lots of writers and online marketers join us. It happens weekly on Tuesdays at 10 a.m. CST: come join us!

Here’s an example of a stream of tweets from #ContentWritingChat, so you get an idea of what a chat on Twitter looks like:



You can get straight to a “live” feed of a real-time Twitter chat on Twitter itself by clicking *Live* once you search the chat hashtag on Twitter:



I’ve listed a resource of 25 top Twitter chats for marketers in the Appendix, as well as basic Twitter chat etiquette. Twitter chats will help you grow your following immensely, if you do them the right way. By that, I simply mean that you should engage as naturally as possible, be as helpful

as you can when you answer the chat questions, and follow (and talk to) those whose answers you like. If you want to join only writing chats or even SEO chats that will build your knowledge base in this very industry, there are many to choose from. For example, I join the #SEOchat and many times, I just sit, read and engage with the participants, instead of providing answers—it can get pretty SEO heavy.

One of the best ways to stay notified on Twitter chats and which ones are going live is to follow @allchats on Twitter. They keep updated, detailed times of when chats are going live on Twitter, with daily tweet lists.

Facebook Groups: These are a huge opportunity for interaction, and for something else specifically: obtaining great critique on your writing. Simply look for groups by doing a Facebook search using keywords like “writing,” and request to join those you like. I’ve noticed a big audience for fiction writing in these groups, and the people that critique my work have seriously helped me hone my writing skills—even though they weren’t knowledgeable in SEO and online content, these people knew the essence of good writing and helped me improve my writing flow.

The rules are fairly simple with Facebook groups: Know what the group rules are before you even engage (usually pinned at the top of the group). Don’t post too much content at once, if you’re posting for critique (but short, readable bits are good). Thank anyone who helps you to keep the engagement rolling.

As you build up your experience, workload, and writing clientele, stay up to date on the world of social media marketing—there are new platforms, apps and tools coming online all the time. So, don’t isolate yourself in only one corner of the internet; don’t be afraid to market yourself widely, and try new avenues and approaches. But don’t waste your time, either, by jumping on every new platform. Some may not be aligned with your ideal audience and potential lead crowd. Instead, wait for an expert in that area (a social media influencer, for example, if it’s a new social platform) to join and give their expert review. Do your own research, and see if it’s in line with your

brand; if your ideal consumer is present there, join. Just be selective. The essence of how to market yourself successfully on every platform could garner an entirely separate (and large) novel. The world of social media is huge, and it's a great clientele playground for us writers.

So, stay up to date with your knowledge of what's happening online, and join platforms where you might potentially make great connections.

What will happen in 2016 and beyond? Only time will tell. There are many new marketing tools, platforms, and tactics on the rise in our online world, and if I were to make one prediction as I close this book, it would be that online content and all forms of content marketing via the internet will only continue to grow, and so will the growth of platforms, usability tools, and other ways to make this type of marketing easier and more accessible. As a good online writer, it's crucial that you keep your knowledge current. Keep reading, learning, and growing, my writer reader.

Final Thoughts

The writer is in demand more so than ever before, the channel just changed: it's an *online* need. Everything revolves around great writing in online marketing—so, you as a writer are in a great era!

Congratulations on choosing to read my book; I hope you've learned something you can apply. If I could give you one simple takeaway, right now, it would be this:

Never stop learning and growing. Put in the work. Keep up your creativity. Question and dig deeper.

OK, that's a lot more than one takeaway, but each of those go hand in hand. Here's how.

Never stop learning and growing is like maintaining a writer's heartbeat. A beautiful thing about online writing is that you're always learning something new, through every topic you dive in to research and write on. If you ever let your knowledge and ongoing learning stagnate, your opportunities, growth, skillset, and subsequently, income, will become stunted and stagnate, too.

Stay motivated to *work hard*, too. How hard you work equates to your success. No one's going to do it but you. Whether that's the success of your content in general, or your direct paycheck—or both, since content marketing is 90% of my lead generation.

Never let your creativity die. Take a breather if you feel your creative muse becoming squashed. Take time for yourself. As writers, rest for the mind and time off is crucial, and sometimes we don't do it often enough. (Myself included.)

Question and dig deeper. You'll understand what I mean by this the more you practice writing, I believe. It's something I've seen myself naturally

grow in quite a bit the last 4-5 years, and what I'd value as one of my best writing talents today. Writing a blog isn't enough for me now. I question what I read and everything I learn, and *that's* the way I learn more. Questions like who said it, and why. And when. I dig to get down to the accuracy and truth of what I find online; and when it's not there, I go ask Steve at BuzzSumo for custom survey results or conduct my own survey with Google's help. So, when you write out a concept, ask yourself, what's the bigger picture? Go to the treetops for a bird's eye view of your writing, and ask yourself if it answers *every single* question on the topic. Then home in close and see if every statement you made is accurate.

This is the questioning a great writer will do to get the best results.

Curiosity will open up your mind, and therefore, the world; an inquisitive mind is easily one of the writer's greatest strengths.

As you continue to write, think about working smarter, not harder; go for the bigger clients, and don't be afraid to ask for what you're worth. You can even challenge yourself with new types of online writing. I've been amazed by how many general writers in my team discover they've had a gift all along in a certain style or type of writing (for example, one of our technical writers wrote a very creative marketing script).

With the knowledge in my guide, you're armed with all the tactics you need to launch forward successfully into the world of online writing.

But remember, these specialized skills must be kept sharp, so consider yourself and your newfound expertise always a work in progress.

Never stop studying and learning. Keep practicing and refining your writing. I'm here for questions as much as possible, via my Facebook group (see Appendix).

Good luck, writer!

“Who wants to become a writer? And why? Because it’s the answer to everything. ... It’s the streaming reason for living. To note, to pin down, to build up, to create, to be astonished at nothing, to cherish the oddities, to let nothing go down the drain, to make something, to make a great flower out of life, even if it’s a cactus.” —Enid Bagnold

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V. Getting Started Making Money & Marketing Yourself as a Copywriter

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Appendix

SEO/Content Marketing Blogs & Resources to Follow

Keep your SEO and content marketing knowledge up to date by following and reading content from these top sources. I recommend subscribing to their newsletters and reading what piques your interest as a writer, or features news and updates in SEO and content marketing.

Content Marketing Institute, <http://contentmarketinginstitute.com/>

Copyblogger, <http://www.copyblogger.com/>

HubSpot Blogs, <http://blog.hubspot.com/>

Official Google Blog, <https://googleblog.blogspot.com/>

Moz, <https://moz.com/>

Marketing

Profs,

<http://www.marketingprofs.com/marketing/library/articles/>

Marketing Land, <http://marketingland.com/>

Neil Patel, Quick Sprout, <http://www.quicksprout.com/blog/>

Search Engine Journal, <http://www.searchenginejournal.com/>

Search Engine Land, <http://searchengineland.com/>

Search Engine Watch, <http://searchenginewatch.com/>

SEMrush Blog, <http://www.semrush.com/blog/>

Social Media Examiner, <http://www.socialmediaexaminer.com/>

Social Media Today, <http://www.socialmediatoday.com/>

My blog: The Write Blog, <https://expresswriters.com/write-blog/>

SEO & Content Creation/Marketing Tool List

SEMrush, my favorite SEO software and analysis tool:
<http://www.semrush.com/>

Wordtracker, SEO tool for keyword discovery:

<http://www.wordtracker.com/>. You can also learn in-depth SEO and keyword research tactics from their Academy section, <http://www.wordtracker.com/academy>

Authority Metrics, SEO keyword finder tool. This is a very thorough tool that simply focuses on finding good keywords. I'd recommend this tool for more advanced SEO users: <http://www.authoritymetrics.com/>

KeywordTool.io, an easy-to-use tool that shows you simple keyword data, including a tab for question search results: <http://keywordtool.io/>

KWFinder.com, a powerful long-tail keyword finder, with detailed scores from easy-hard on keyword data: <https://kwfinder.com/>

Übersuggest, simple tool for finding long-tail keyword suggestions from Google for your seed keywords: <https://ubersuggest.io/>

Yoast's SEO WordPress plug-in is a tool I use daily when posting content to my blog. It's an easy-to-use tool that works like a grammar check, except it checks SEO, inside your WordPress blog. <https://wordpress.org/plugins/wordpress-seo/>

BuzzSumo is the content marketer's must-have tool for finding influencers to connect to, discovering top content, setting content alerts for anything from brand mentions to what's new in your industry, and so much more: <http://buzzsumo.com/>

BuzzSumo guides I'd recommend to help you get started with this tool:

- The "Knowledge Base" is a great place to for thorough guides on their major features: <http://buzzsumo.com/knowledge-base/>
- How to Find Influencers to Amplify Your Content Marketing: <http://buzzsumo.com/blog/how-to-find-influencers-to-amplify-your-content-marketing/>
- BuzzSumo Tips & Tricks: <http://www.slideshare.net/buzzsumo/buzzsumo-tips-and-tricks>
- Content Marketing Planning & Research

<http://www.slideshare.net/buzzsumo/content-marketing-research-planning-with-buzzsumo>

- I've recorded a podcast episode with the co-founder of BuzzSumo, Steve Rayson, discussing all kinds of strategies for the content marketer on using BuzzSumo: <https://expresswriters.com/the-write-podcast-episode-8-how-buzzsumo-can-help-the-content-marketer-how-to-stand-out-in-a-content-crowd-with-steve-rayson/>

Copyscape is a thorough copy plagiarism checker; my staff editors run every page of content our writers write through this tool to make sure it comes back 100% free of duplicate hits. It's \$0.05/per search, but worth it to make sure your content is 100% original before you post it: <http://copyscape.com/>

Copywriting & SEO Help

Brian Dean at Backlinko has put together an extensive, thorough, and visual guide to keyword research: <http://backlinko.com/keyword-research>

Quick Sprout's Advanced Guide to SEO is a place to go to learn everything (and more) you need to know about SEO. There's probably more than a typical online writer needs to know here, but it's a great resource. Chapter 6 deals with Keyword Research: <http://www.quicksprout.com/the-advanced-guide-to-seo/>

Moz's beginner guide to SEO is a popular online publication for learning the basics of SEO and how it works, <https://moz.com/beginners-guide-to-seo/>

Quick Sprout also has a very thorough guide on copywriting I'd recommend, <https://www.quicksprout.com/the/definitive-guide-to-copywriting/>

Copyblogger has all kinds of writing resources and ebooks in their My.Copyblogger Marketing Library. I'd highly recommend visiting through

their library and downloading what interests you (most of it is free), <http://my.copyblogger.com/type/ebooks/>

ProBlogger is a great resource and community for tips, tricks, and growing your blogging knowledge, <http://www.problogger.net/>

Jon Morrow, Guest Blogging Certification Course, <http://guestblogging.com/public/guest-blogging-certification/> & Jon Morrow, Smart Blogger, <https://smartblogger.com/> Jon Morrow is one of the top bloggers online, and I've honed my web content writing skills by taking his guest blogging course. His blog, Smart Blogger, is full of great online copywriting tips, tricks and advice.

Headline Creation Tools

The Advanced Marketing Institute's Emotional Marketing Value Headline Analyzer is a wonderful tool to help you formulate the best headlines according to intellectual, empathetic, and spiritual/emotional triggers for highest impact. Getting between a 30-50% score is a great result: <http://www.aminstitute.com/headline/>

For headline power words, see our resource of 120 power words and the 10 best-converting CTA phrases: <https://expresswriters.com/resources/120-power-words-for-headlines-10-cta-phrases/>

CoSchedule has a great blog resource for headline writers, 33 Easy Ways To Write A Headline That Will Make You Successful: <http://coschedule.com/blog/write-a-headline/>

HubSpot's Title Generator can help you come up with awesome headlines: <http://www.hubspot.com/blog-topic-generator>

Portent has a Content Idea Generator that works similarly, but can provide varied ideas: <https://www.portent.com/tools/title-maker>

Content Auditing Resources

I wrote a beginner's guide to content auditing on my blog: <https://expresswriters.com/out-with-the-old-why-how-to-do-a-new-year->

[website-content-audit/](#) & a DIY/tool-focused content auditing guide on Content Marketing Institute:

<http://contentmarketinginstitute.com/2015/08/analytics-content-audits/>

Moz has a thorough guide on content auditing: <https://moz.com/blog/content-audit-tutorial>

Quick Sprout's resource is great, too: <https://www.quicksprout.com/2014/04/24/how-to-conduct-a-content-audit-on-your-site/>

Social Media Tools/Resources

New to Twitter chatting? Read my post on Twitter chat etiquette: <https://expresswriters.com/10-rules-to-be-a-successful-participant-in-your-twitter-chats/>

Here's my list of 25 top Twitter chats for marketers to follow, on Social Media Examiner: <http://www.socialmediaexaminer.com/25-twitter-chats-just-for-marketers/>

For high-volume Twitter chats, I love the free tool TweetDeck by Twitter. You can add a feed (for example, a Twitter chat) and see real-time, live activity: <https://tweetdeck.twitter.com/>

Buffer is one of my favorite social media scheduling tools: <https://buffer.com/> Hootsuite is another great alternative to Buffer: <https://hootsuite.com/>

Visual Tools

Canva is my favorite, mostly free image creation tool, incredibly powerful and easy to use for adding visuals to blogs: <https://www.canva.com/>

My team and I put together a list of free stock photo sites: <https://expresswriters.com/resources/20-incredible-free-stock-photo-resources/>

Writing Jobs/Growth Resources

My Facebook Group, Learn Online Writing

I started this group as a follow-up community to my book. Post your questions and I (or my moderators) will help you as best as we can:

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/learnonlinewriting/>

Hiring at Express Writers

If you're interested in sending in your résumé as a candidate for my writing agency at Express Writers, follow these links:

- Editor's application: <https://expresswriters.com/hire-editors/>
- Writer's application: <https://expresswriters.com/hire-writers/>

Freelance Job Sites

Upwork is a platform where you can create a freelancer profile and access writing jobs: <https://www.upwork.com/>

Look in your city/top cities for writing gigs: <https://craigslist.org>

Great marketplace to find all kinds of writing jobs listed by companies: <http://www.indeed.com/>

There are tons of jobs in this feed, which pulls daily writing jobs from all over the web, including Craigslist: <http://www.freelancewritinggigs.com/>

My team and I researched and compiled a list of cities where copywriting jobs are growing: <https://expresswriters.com/8-top-cities-where-copywriting-jobs-are-a-booming-career/>

Grow your writing skills by joining and participating on <http://www.writing.com>